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A
PRESERVATIVE
AGAINST
UNSETTLED NOTIONS
AND
Want of Principles in RELIGION.

IN
Several Discourses upon Select Subjects;
relating to Diversity of Opinions, The Difficulties of the Scriptures, Private Judgment, Prejudice, Free-Thinking, Ecclesiastical Authority, Creeds, Articles, and Subscriptions, Popular Errors, and the Encroachments of Infidelity, Heresy, and Schism,

By JOSEPH TRAPP, M. A.
Vicar of CHRIST CHURCH, London.

V O L. I.

The Second Edition.

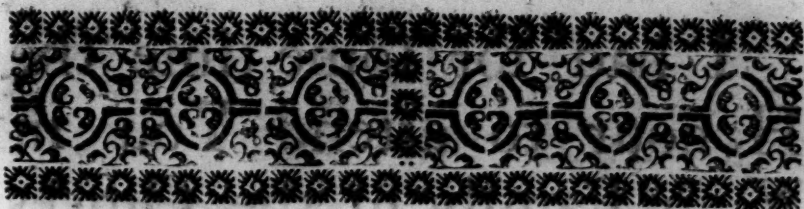
If the Foundations be destroyed; what can the Righteous do? Psal. xi. 3.

It must needs be that Offences come; but wo to that Man, by whom the Offence cometh, Matth. xviii. 7.

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T O

Sir *Constantine Phipps.*

S I R,

 T must be proper to
inscribe These Dis-
courses to *You* ; up-
on the Account both
of their *Author*, and of their
Subjects. The Former stands
in a manner *Related* to *You* ;
and the Latter are the Foun-
dations of Your *Principles*,
and *Practice*.

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DEDICATION.

I had for some time the Honour to attend You in Your Family in the Offices of Religion; and have ever since been favoured with Your particular Friendship. And though You are not Now in That High Station, which You Then adorned; yet Your Friendship is as high an Honour, as ever: A truly Great, and Good, Man supports Those Characters, in a *Private*, as well as in a *Publick*, Capacity.

Your Behaviour in Both has been such; that the *Subjects* of These Discourses are as properly *Yours*, as Their *Author*: A fixed Scheme of
Sound

DEDICATION.

Sound Principles, having always been the Rule and Standard of Your Actions.

I am very sensible, Sir, how nice, and difficult a Task it is, to make Addresses of This Nature; and to praise even the most Deserving, when we speak to the Persons Themselves. And yet sometimes it must, it ought to be done: Reputation is one of the Rewards of Vertue; Nor is such Praise *always* Flattery: Whether it be so, or not, in any particular Instance, we *must Appeal to the World*; which is all we can do, in such Cases. That Appeal I now make with great

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Assurance ; and desire to be judged by the Consciences of All who know You ; even of Your Enemies, as well as Friends. And I am the more confident ; when I consider, that by doing You This Justice, I do but humbly Subscribe to the United Encomiums which have already been given You, in the most publick , and solemn Manner, by the University of *Oxford*, of which I have the Honour to be a Member, though an Unworthy One ; by the House of Lords, and both Houses of Convocation in *Ireland* ; and by That Best of Queens, our late Pious Queen

DEDICATION.

Queen *ANNE*, of truly
Glorious, and ever Blessed
Memory.

Not that I presume to
attempt Your Character in
general; but only to take
notice of so much, as relates
to These Treatises, of which
I desire Your Acceptance.
It were otherwise very easy
to enlarge upon Your Skill,
and eminent Abilities in the
Law; upon the Strength,
and Weight, of Your Learn-
ing, and Eloquence. But I
am so far from insisting up-
on These *Advantages*; that I
pass over even all Your
Vertues, which do not im-
mediately relate to my pre-

DEDICATION.

sented Design: Such as are Your open Generosity, and Candour, and incomparable Sweetness of Temper; which must ever endear You to All, who have the Happiness of Your Acquaintance.

But, Sir, You must give me leave to say, that Your Courage, Constancy, untainted Integrity, and firm Adherence to Good Principles, are fit to be more than mentioned by me upon This Occasion: Because Those Vertues are Subjects of the ensuing Discourses. You are not in the Number of Those, who think a Man the less *Wise*, and *Great*, for being *Good*:

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Good: and who are of opinion, that all *Prudence* consists in *Craft*, and *Cunning*. On the contrary, to the perfect Knowledge of the Law You have ever joined the Truth, and Simplicity, of the Gospel. Upon which I unavoidably observe, that *Law* and *Divinity* are nearly allied: and upon That Account too you cannot be an improper Patron of These Discourses. Especially when it shall be considered, that, to Your Immortal Honour, You were once an *Advocate* of *Sound Divinity* it self: For which, as well as for many
other

DEDICATION.

other Reasons, I am obliged
to be, as I am, with a *Sincerity*
like *Your Own*,

S I R,

Your most Faithful,

and most Obedient Servant,

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JOSEPH TRAPP.

T H E



T H E P R E F A C E.



WHEN the very Foundations of Religion are boldly and openly struck at; He must be One of its most unworthy Professors, who can sit still an idle Spectator of its Danger. And therefore I shall make no Apology for the Publication of These Discourses; because, considering the Importance of their Subjects, especially at This Time, I am verily persuaded they may do some Good in the World, even with all their Faults and Imperfections. I am sure my Design is Right; whatever may be my Success.

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It has of late been much talked, that Clergymen ought to preach chiefly, if not wholly, upon Practical Points. But how plausible soever This may appear at first Sight; I look upon it, as it has been managed, to be One of the most mischievous Tenets that ever was maintained; and to have been maintained too with a very ill Intention. The Proposition indeed is true, if rightly understood: But in the Sense in which it has commonly been taken, Nothing can be more false, or destructive.

For by Practical Points, They mean only the Preceptive Parts of Christianity, as distinguished from the Doctrinal; the Agenda, as distinguished from the Credenda: Whereas in Truth all Divine Subjects are properly Practical; though some more immediately relate to Practice, than Others. But to affirm that we ought to insist only, or even chiefly, upon the several Vertues,

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ties, and Vices, the Rules of Morality, and our Deviations from them; so as to neglect the Mystery of Godliness, the great Points of Redemption, and Grace, the Merits and Satisfaction of Christ, Justification, Sanctification, &c. the Immortality of the Soul, the Eternity of Punishments, as well as of Rewards, the Necessity of Faith, as much as of Practice, and of Church-Communion, as of Either: I say, to affirm that we ought to insist upon the Former of These, so as to neglect the Latter, is one of the most pernicious Errors that ever was broached, since the Original Heresy of Simon Magus.

*On the contrary, These Latter ought chiefly to be insisted upon; because they are of the utmost Importance, and of the greatest Difficulty. Who knows not that Drunkenness, and Fornication, Swearing, and Injustice, are grievous Sins? Who understands
not*

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not both the Nature, and the Consequences of These, and many more which I need not mention? But Those other Points which I just now named, require Explanation; nay many of them are very difficult to be explained; and various Errors have been spread concerning them. Then as for their Importance; let These be once firmly Established, the Practice of all Christian Vertues will follow of course; if they are but interspersed with the other Subjects of which I am speaking, and frequently, and affectionately, though briefly, recommended; and sometimes largely and particularly insisted upon. Whereas on the Reverse, were we to preach seven Sermons in the Week, upon Charity, Temperance, Humility, and the like (though it be absolutely necessary for Us sometimes to discourse upon them, and for All habitually to practise them) it will be to very little, or

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no purpose ; unless the Doctrinal Part of Christianity be strongly inculcated, and deeply rooted in the Minds of Men. It is necessary indeed that the Wheels of a Watch, or a Clock, should be regularly disposed : But if the Springs, or Weights be wanting, or insufficient, the whole Machine will certainly be useless : And though the outward Parts of a Man's Body be never so much taken care of ; yet if the Vitals be impaired, Every one knows what is like to be the Consequence. And therefore I must needs say, scarce any Thing, I believe, has of late Years been more prejudicial to Religion, than This Neglect of the Theological Part of it strictly so called : And it is very greatly to be lamented, that some Writers, even of our own Church, out of an undue Ferzour in opposing some Erroneous Doctrines of Calvin have ran into the other Extreme, and too little regarded the necessary Doctrines of Divinity.

Nor

Nor does *This* in the least contradict what I have said in the ensuing Discourses, concerning the ill Management, and ill Effects, of Controversies in Religion, and the grand Importance of Practising it. For besides that I acknowledge Controversies to be so far necessary, that we are obliged to Defend the great Articles of Christianity, when they are Attacked; and that I there take the Word Practice in a wide Sense, not as distinct from Faith, but from Controversies, and as including all that is required of Christians, which involves true Faith, as well as a Moral Life; I say besides That, even the most disputed Doctrines are always necessary to be taught, though not to be disputed: For though Something of them be controverted, yet Something, and That the greatest Part of them, is agreed in by All. Thus, for Example; though it has been Matter of much Learned Debate (much more, I think, than

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than was needful) whether Faith be the immediate Instrument of Justification, and whether more in That respect ought to be ascribed to Faith, than to Works; yet it has been generally acknowledged, that Both are necessary to Salvation, that no Faith is justifying but That which is Productive of good Works, that we are justified by the Merits of Christ in Conjunction with our Performance of the Conditions required in the Covenant of Grace, that we are freely justified, and freely saved: And so in the Other Instances.

It is true, the Doctrinal Points have been perplexed and intangled by the Schoolmen with some unnecessary Distinctions, and Niceties of Philosophy: Though, by the way, many unjust Reflections have been cast upon Scholastick Divinity, as well as upon the Writings of the Primitive Fathers, by Those who understand Neither. It

were indeed greatly to be wished that some Wits of the Age would join a little more Logick and Metaphysicks with their Politeness: And Learning would have been in a more flourishing Condition than at present it is; if That pretty Word Pedantry had not been so frequently misapplied. But supposing the Worst; Because some needless, and some erroneous, Superstructures have been raised upon the Doctrines; ought therefore the Doctrines Themselves to be laid aside, as false, or insignificant? According to This Argument; when we reformed from Popery, we ought to have reformed from Christianity: And That indeed is the Thorough Reformation, which Some, who call themselves Protestants, seem to pant after.

Else, What do They mean by resolving all Religion into Natural Reason? By exploding Faith, and Mystery? By their perpetual Declamations about Priests, and Priestcraft? By their Cavils

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vils at the Difficulties and obscure Passages of the Sacred Scriptures? By their immoderate Encomiums upon the Heathen Moralists; and by their Ridiculing, or Calumniating, the Christian?

As most Ages have been signalized by some particular Corruption, or other; A General Confusion of Principles seems to be the distinguishing Character of This: The Enemies of Religion seem not so much concerned to propagate false Principles, as to abolish all Principles; and This chiefly from the Consideration of Controversies, Difficulties, and Diversity of Opinions. Because, forsooth, All are not of the same Mind, therefore Nobody is in the Right; and because Some things are difficult, therefore Nothing is certain. And it is indeed amazing to observe, how much Success This senseless Arguing has met with. But I shall say no more of it Here; because I have fully discussed it in the Body of This Book:

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Of which I proceed to give the Reader a more particular Account.

The main Design of it is to oppose That pernicious Notion, which I just now mentioned. But because there is a certain ungodly Confederacy between That and some Others; I have treated of Many in several distinct Discourses: though there is a very near Affinity between them. It is for This Reason that some Things are touched upon in One, which are treated of in Another: But This, I hope, will be looked upon as Reference, rather than Repetition; and as an Advantage, rather than a Fault; since the Whole will thereby appear to be more of a Piece, and the Scope of my main Argument more clearly perceived.

*It would indeed have been no very difficult Task, to have reduced them All to One continued Treatise. But considering that the Coherence of the Subjects, and their mutual Dependance upon each other, is such, that, as They
are,*

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are, They may almost be regarded as One; I thought That Alteration unnecessary. And as it was in That Respect unnecessary; so in Another Respect it would have been prejudicial. Because the several Discourses would have lost some of their Strength, and Clearness, if ever they had Any; had they been new-modelled, and thrown out of That Form in which they were Originally Composed, and Preached.

The First, and Second, are immediately and directly pointed against the Attempts of Those, who are for Abolishing all settled Principles in Religion; and (if I may so speak without a Contradiction in Terms) for Establishing an Universal Scepticism. That many even well-meaning People have been deceived by These pernicious, though foolish, Men, I have great Reason to think: To relieve whom from That Hurry of Thought under which they labour, I have endeavour-

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ed to fix their wandring Ideas, and to shew them that notwithstanding the great Diversity of Opinions, and the Difficulties which are in Religion, and the Holy Scriptures, there is still such a Thing as Truth in the World; that there is a certain Way to find it; and that the Scriptures are infallibly the Word of God.

And here it may be proper enough to take Notice of the Difference between Those who are Thus deceived, and Those who deceive them; or, in other Words, between a deluded Doubter, and a professed Sceptick. The First indeed are apt to neglect all Arguments which may convince them; The Last ludicrously and superficially view them, but with a firm Resolution never to be convinced by them. They slightly examine things; but it is only with a Design to pick Holes, and find Faults; to make small Cavils, and frivolous Objections. They doubt indeed of every thing;

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thing ; but differ from the Others in This, that Those are carelessly, These are industriously, Scrupulous; Doubting in Those is Negligence, in These it is Business : It is a Sin of Omission in the Former, of Commission in the Latter : The Former are dissatisfied, because they do not endeavour to be otherwise ; the Latter are dissatisfied, because they desire, and labour, to be so. This Vice is chiefly found among Those, who imagine at least they are of the better Sort ; The Common People, it seems, are not well enough Bred to be Guilty of it. They seldom pretend to this Fineness of Raillery ; though, for any thing that is in it, they might easily attain to the Qualification. A silly Affectation of Wit, joined with an irreligious Temper, and a Sett of very profligate Principles, if there be any Principles in it at all, is sufficient to equip and furnish a Man for the Profession.

This, if I mistake not, I have abundantly made out in my Third Discourse, concerning the Causes of Scoffing at Religion, and the Folly, and Misery, of Those who are Guilty of it. How near an Affinity This Subject has with the Preceding, is too evident of it self to require any Explanation: And the great Controversy about Reason, and Faith, is there, I hope, clearly adjusted. I hope too that my long Quotation from the incomparable Monsieur Pascal will be excused; because it is so Excellent in it self; and because the Author, from whom it is taken, was no Priest, but as very a Layman as Those who make such a hideous Clamour against Priestcraft; though as much a wiser Man, as a better Christian. It is true, he was a Frenchman, and a Papist, though a very Moderate One: And That terrible Objection must remain in full force against me, that I think a French-

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Frenchman, and a Papist, may, in some Things, be in the right.

There is however One very material Point relating to Faith, entirely omitted in That Discourse: And therefore it is distinctly treated of in the Next. In which I have endeavoured to explain the Nature of Faith, as it belongs to the Will; and to shew wherein the Vertue of it consists. This I thought very proper to be done; because there is some Difficulty in it; and even Religious Persons, who have not been accustomed to abstract Thinking, may possibly be dissatisfied about it.

Considering the strange Variety of absurd, and impious Opinions, which I have before taken notice of; it may appear very wonderful that they should be received and cultivated in the World. And therefore my Fifth Discourse is upon a Judicial Infatuation; the Nature, Causes, and Justice, of it. What is there said upon the Treatise of Free-thinking,

thinking, *was written, and preached, exactly as it is now printed, in a few Days after That impious and ridiculous Pamphlet was published: Otherwise, Those many Answers to it, which have since appeared in the World (especially That of the incomparable Phileleutherus Lipsiensis, as a most Learned Author of our own Nation is pleased to call Himself)* would have rendered *my short Strictures altogether unnecessary. However, because the Profaneness and Ignorance of That Infidel-Writer cannot be too much exposed; I thought it proper to let them stand as they were, without any manner of Alteration.*

From Infidelity, and Heresy, it is an easy Transition to Schism; and so vice versâ. And therefore my Next Discourse relates to the Protestant Separatists from our Church; whom I take to be the most unreasonable Sett of Men this day in the World. Those Nations which are [ignorant of Christianity,

stianity, want the Means of Conviction : The same may, in a great measure, be said of the Popish Countries : And as for the Papists of our own, They pretend at least that Communion with our Church is unlawful. But for Men to live in the midst of the clearest Light, and wilfully shut their Eyes against it; to prefer the most frivolous Cavils before the plainest Demonstrations; to come on again, and again, with the same trifling Objections, which have been answered ten thousand times over; to tear in Pieces That Church with which They own it is lawful to Communicate, and from which therefore we demonstrate it is unlawful to Separate; and all this for no Reason, but purely out of Opposition, and to gratify their own perverse Humours, contrary to the express Word of God, and the Welfare of Human Society; is so monstrous, so inexcusable, an Obstinacy; that, did we not see it, we could not believe it possible.

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A Sett of Men, condemned by all Sorts and Denominations of Christians; Papists, and Protestants; Episcopal, and Presbyterian; and Censured, nay Anathematized, by Calvin Himself.

What Churchmen then must Those be, who, being of our own Communion, are not only favourable to, but zealous for, These unreasonable Disturbers of our Peace; perpetually espousing their Interest, in direct Opposition to That of the Church, pleading their Cause, and celebrating their Praises! The Dissenters! upon all Occasions: Protestant Dissenters! Those Names with them are Sacred; and there is a kind of Charm in the very Sound of the Words. According to Them, Nothing can be said, or done, in Defence of the Constitution, but presently the Toleration must be in danger: The Church, by all means, must be new-modelled, i. e. confounded, that the Dissenters may not be disobliged; and a Comprehension

prehension is publickly proposed, and argued for. That absurd, That wicked Scheme, a Comprehension! Which, whenever it takes effect (as I trust in God it never will) cannot fail to finish the Destruction of the purest Church in Christendom.

As yet, the purest Church in Christendom; How long it will continue so, God only knows: Because I doubt the Tenets of many of its professed Members grow less and less pure every day. For I speak not only of Those who attack it from without, but of Those who betray it from within. A gradual Relaxation of its Doctrines, and Discipline, can never be attended with good Consequences. I fear Heresy, and Infidelity, gain ground upon us, as well as Schism. And Some think, we must be very tender to All Three; that we may give sufficient Proofs of our thorough Aversion from Popery. We have long since discarded

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ed all the Errors of the Romish Church ; and the Church of England has done more against it, than all the other Protestants in the World put together. But are there no Errors, besides Those of Popery ? And must we put our selves upon the Level with Schismatics, Hereticks, Mahometans, and Pagans, in order to prove our selves good Protestants ? What can be a greater Glory to Popery, than This ? And what a greater Reproach, and Scandal, to the Reformation ? If to be a Protestant, is only Not to be a Papist ; the Jews, Turks, and Indians, are Protestants, as well as We.

Nothing in the World has contributed more to the Growth of Distempers, than preposterous Schemes of Healing. Can Confusion be the Way to Peace ? Does Reconcilement consist in a Medley of Inconsistencies ? And is a Constitution to be strengthened by the Admission of its Enemies into its Bowels ? Surely I cannot consult my Health,
by

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by receiving Poison into my Veins; And to cherish and nurse a Fever, is a most improper Method of curing it.

But our Adversaries are in full Possession of Those good Words, Moderation, Tenderneſs, Mutual Forbearance, and ſo forth; And therein lies the main Strength of their Arguments.

How weak all the Strength of them is, I think I have ſufficiently proved, in the Diſcourſe of which I am ſpeaking; and Thither I refer the Reader.

*If we duly reflect upon the Tendency of multiplying Controverſies in Divinity; we cannot but think that it is very dangerous. While Men contend about diſputed Points in the Chriſtian Religion; the Chriſtian Religion it ſelf ſtands between them, and too often receives the Blows from both Sides. I have therefore, in my Seventh Diſcourſe, endeavoured to guard againſt ſo great a Miſchief. This indeed is the main Deſign of them All; but more
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particularly of That, which I just now mentioned. In which I propose to shew the peculiar Advantages of Christianity, as distinguished from all other Religions: A Subject, very necessary to be treated of in These Times; in which Men set up for an Universal Levelling in Religion, and make no difference between a good Christian, and a good Heathen.

What I have There said upon the Subject of Baptism, will probably give great Offence to Many. If it does; I am sorry for it, but cannot help it: Sorry, I mean, for Their Sakes, but not for my Own. Because I take it to be not only a True, but a Fundamental, Doctrine and; absolutely Necessary to be insisted upon. This I do not there pretend to prove, because it is already so well done to my Hand: I only assert it; for the Proof I refer to the Learned and Ingenious Author of Lay-Baptism invalid; Whose Answerers

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Swearers have only given Him occasion to make his Demonstration the more uncontestable. For Demonstration it is to Me; And it was always Matter of My Wonder, that there should be any Controversy about it.

That my Eighth Discourse, upon Confounding the Distinction between Good and Evil, is nearly allied to all the rest, and greatly contributes to my main Design of Fixing, and Ascertaining, the Principles of Religion; is likewise too plain, to require any Explication. This is the only One of the whole Number, that ever was Printed before; having been Preached as an Assize-Sermon at Oxford, Seven Years ago; and Published at the Request of the High-Sheriff, and Grand-Jury. It is for This Reason that some Things relating to Judicial Proceedings are particularly specify'd; and that Infidelity, and Blasphemy, are mentioned as fit to be punished by the Judges.

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Yet I have omitted the greatest Part of the Title-Page, the Dedication, and a Sentence, or two, in the Sermon it self, more immediately directed to the Auditory, before whom it was Preached; that This Discourse might not appear in a different Form and Dress from Those with which it is accompanied, and to which it is so nearly related.

*And since I have This Opportunity, I will here take Notice of what I should otherwise never have troubled my self about; an Answer, which the famous Author of The Rights of the Christian Church (if the Author, and Defender, of That Book be the same Person) is pleased to give to my Quotation from Him, in the Discourse of which I am now speaking, concerning the Horeb-Contract, as he calls it. He says, He * not only distinguishes between God's Government of the*

* Second Defense of the Rights. P. 132.

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Universe, and of the Jews; but puts it on the Pleasure of God, that He asked their Consent.

*Now besides that I intended to take Notice of his former Distinction by Those Words, AS THEIR Prince; and if I had not, yet whosoever affirms that God has not an absolute Right to be King of any particular People whom He pleases in a particular manner to reign over, without their previous Consent, does, at the same time, and by necessary Consequence, deny Him the absolute Government of the World, which is what I there charge upon This Author; and that he mentions the latter so very tenderly, by only saying, * God was pleased to offer Himself to be their King, that I had no Reason to take notice of it: I say, besides all This, and to take his Argument in its full force, with all*

* Rights, &c. P. 151.

its Refinements ; Either the People of the Jews had, in and of themselves, an original inherent Right, or Power, (One, or Both) to chuse God for their particular King ; or they had not. If they had ; then the Creatures may have, in and of themselves, a Right, or Power, independent of the Creator. If they had not ; then it was the strangest Contract that ever was heard of : It was a Contract only on one side. For all Treaties, strictly and properly so called, suppose in both Parties an antecedent original Right, or Power, of Treating, or not Treating, and some such Right about which the Treaty is to be made. His Doctrine, explained in the First Signification, is, I confess, only plain Nonsense : In the Last, it is both Nonsense, and Blasphemy. Our Author has, no doubt, a natural Right to chuse which Side he pleases.

Besides ; His Relation of the Fact, as He pretends, from Exod. xix. and Deut.

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Deut. v. is totally false; Of which He himself seems to be sensible, by his not quoting the Words, nor so much as referring to the Verses, but only to the Chapters. In Exodus God speaks thus; If ye will obey my Voice indeed, and keep my Covenant; then ye shall be A PECULIAR Treasure unto Me above all People: **FOR ALL THE EARTH IS MINE.** And ye shall be unto me a Kingdom of Priests, and an holy Nation. And the People answer, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do. In Deuteronomy, Moses only says; The Lord our God made a Covenant with us in Horeb. Who knows not that by his Covenant is meant his Law? Which is no farther a Covenant, than as it is founded upon a free gracious Promise of a Reward on the one hand, upon the Performance of Conditions on the other; not that it is a Contract properly and strictly so called, as if both

Parties had in themselves an antecedent Right of Treating. What can be more plain from both Places considered together, than that God makes them his peculiar People, purely because it was his Pleasure, and for no other Reason; He having before an uncontrollable Dominion over them as Creatures, All the Earth being his? Not to observe that God does not here call Himself their King; but supposing He did, Is He pleased to offer Himself to be their King, as a Candidate does at an Election, if they please to chuse Him, and so as to suppose in Them a Right of Refusal? For That this Author must mean, by the Word Offer; if He means any thing at all to His purpose: His Argument, as I have shewn above, being otherwise Nothing but mere Sound and Amusement. And how do the People expressly consent? Why, He expressly affirms it; and That's All. For there is not one Word of any such Thing

Thing in the Chapters he refers to; farther than their promising to perform the Conditions, which alone would entitle them to the peculiar Privilege, which God freely, and graciously, and without asking their Consent to his being their King, is pleased to offer them. In plain Words therefore, and common Sense; God declares that they shall have the particular Advantage of being His own People, if they will obey His Commands; upon which they promise that they will so obey. And This is what our Author calls an Offer, on the One hand; a Consent, on the Other; and a Contract, on Both. Whereas in the Truth of the Matter, They do not chuse God for Their King, but He chuses Them for His People: And more cannot possibly be extorted from That Passage by These impious Men; who, as it appears from their Principles, would have no King at all, if they could help it; no, not the God that made them.

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At to his Civil Language, ranking me with Liars, Pick-pockets, and Perjured Villains; and his other personal Reflections, foreign to the Controversy: I have been so long used to bear such Treatment; that I am not in the least moved by it, any farther than to pity and forgive Those from whom I receive it.

The Truth is, opprobrious Names, and bitter Invectives, are the main Arguments which the Enemies of Religion have to depend upon. So that considering the two grand Principles upon which They proceed, Noise, and Ignorance; One may properly apply to These foolish Men, the Character which the Wise Man gives of a foolish Woman: A foolish Woman is clamorous; She is simple, and knoweth nothing.

Prov. ix.
13.

*I have only This to say of my Last Discourse, concerning the Uneasiness of Controversies in Religion, &c.
That*

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That, as it there appears, it was very proper to be the Last. The Subject however is of the greatest Weight; and deserves our closest, and most serious Attention.

Though I have in the Discourses themselves taken notice of the Zeal, and Earnestness, as it really ought to be called, or the Heat, and Violence, as it commonly is called, with which we sometimes treat These important Subjects; yet I shall here add a little more upon it: Because I verily believe the Misapplication of Words, especially the Words, Heat, Violence, Temper, Moderation, &c. has of late done more Mischief to Religion, than all the other Engines which its grand Enemy has employed against it. Did we not prove the Points we undertook, which at the same time are of the utmost Moment and Consequence; or even after That, did we make personal and uncharitable Reflections;

flections; Something might with Reason be said against us. But when we have endeavoured to instruct the Understanding, is it a Fault to apply to the Affections? and to move the Last, after we have convinced the First? If it be; the best Writers, and Speakers, as well as the Wisest, and most Religious, of Men (allowed to be so by all the World) have in all Ages been grossly Mistaken. Nay, the Examples of the Apostles, especially St. Paul, and even of our Blessed Saviour Himself, are not in This respect to be imitated by us. If This must be called Heat, and Violence; I insist upon it, that there is such a Thing as a Christian Heat, and Violence; nay, a Christian Anger, and Indignation. St. Paul commands Titus to rebuke some Men sharply. And

who were They? Unruly, and vain Talkers, and Deceivers; whose Mouths must be stopped; who sub-

Tit. i. 10.
II.

The Preface.

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subvert whole Houses, teaching Things which they ought not. *And nothing can be more sharp and severe, than some of his own Reprehensions. And in another Place, He bids him* Tit. ii. 15. rebuke with all Authority. Our Blessed Saviour calls the Hypocritical Pharisees, Serpents, and Generation of Vipers: *And at another* Matth. xxiii. 33. time He looks round about on Mark iii. 5. them with Anger, being grieved for the hardness of their Hearts. Were our Affections given us for nothing? Are they not good in themselves? And may not an excellent Use be made of them? Reason, and Passion, have the same relation to each other, as the Rudder, and the Wind; The One is for Guidance, the Other for Motion: And though a Storm at Sea be dangerous; yet a fresh Gale is very desirable. And though Rage, and Fury be pernicious; yet a brisk Motion of the Passions, rightly directed, is extremely

tremely Proper and Advantagious. It is otherwise indeed, according to the Opinions of some People; who are led away by the Magick of which I am speaking. Insomuch that I knew a certain Person preach upon Repentance; and because he pressed the absolute Necessity of it with great Earnestness, he was told, it would have been an Excellent Sermon, if he had not been so hot.

Neither is it always Wisdom to be cool, and slow, any more than it is Vertue. On the contrary, Nothing very often is more prudent, than to be vehement; and Nothing more foolish, than to be listless, and heavy: Though the Idea of Wisdom has of late, I know not why, been attached to the Art of doing Nothing. And therefore Those grave Talkers who tell us, upon all Occasions, that Passion will never convince, might have spared That sage Aphorism: Who ever said it would?

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would? Or how do They prove that We do not bring Reasons to convince? Nay, that our Reasons, are not clear, and cogent, even to the Force of a Demonstration? We apply first to the Understanding, for Conviction; and then to the Passions, for Execution.

I know, almost as well as if the Objection were already made, that I shall be censured by Some, as having been pleading all this while in Defense of Rage, and Fury; though I have expressly declared the direct contrary. I only say, that all Rebuking is not Railing; and that all Vehemence is not Extravagance; and though One of These be always blameable, the Other is very often our indispensable Duty. But, to allude to the Comparison above-mentioned, if a fresh Gale must be called a Storm by some People; it is Their fault, not Mine. Nor do I say that the Earnestness for which I contend, is always proper: It is only to be used
upon

upon some Occasions, and to some Persons: *What, and Who, Those are, I have already intimated; and Prudence will sufficiently direct us to Both.*

I have, in the Discourses Themselves, more than once remarked upon the Temper of Those unreasonable Men; who, while they unjustly accuse Us of Heat and Uncharitableness in the Best of Causes, are Themselves most Outragious, and Malicious, in the Worst: And therefore I shall here say no more upon it. In a Word, Those whom we treat in the manner I have been mentioning, are, 1st, Insolent, and Obstinate. 2dly, They are the Aggressors; fiercely assaulting our Church, and Religion. And whoever attacks me furiously, shall never persuade me to defend my self moderately.

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Let us hear the Conclusion of the whole Matter: Fear God, and keep his Commandments; for this is the whole Duty of Man.

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THE

*The Rule, and Measures of
Searching out Truth in
Religion; and the Ne-
cessity of Adhering to it,
when we have found it.*

I THESS. V. 21.

*Prove all things; hold fast that
which is Good.*

AMONG Those many Texts Discourse
of Scripture which have been I.
wrested and perverted to very
ill Purposes, even so far as to
produce an Effect just contrary to
That which they were intended to
produce; This which I have now
chosen to discourse upon, is none of
B the

The Rule, and Measures

Discourse the least Considerable. It has for some

I. late Years been much in the Mouths of
Men; and an unaccountable Use has been
made of it. At different Times, and by
different Persons, if not by the same Per-
sons, it has been urged in Defence of
Scepticism, and in Praise of *Hypocrisy*: Be-
cause we must *prove all things*, Some infer
that we should *hold fast* nothing; And
from This Precept of the Apostle Others
have undertaken not only to excuse, but
to justify, the most impious Prevarica-
tion that ever enter'd into the Heart of
Man; That, I mean, which was once
known by a Name very much talked of,
with regard to Church - Communion;
but is now, God be praised, abolished
by our Laws. My Work therefore at
this time shall be to do what I never saw
nor heard done yet, to vindicate This
Text of Scripture from the Injuries it has
suffered; to explain it's genuine Mean-
ing; and to shew the true Use we ought
to make of That which has been so long,
and so unreasonably, abused. I shall dis-
course upon the Words in their natural
Order, as they lie before us; containing
two distinct Points; distinct, though nearly
related to each other; *Proving*, i. e. Try-
ing, or Examining *all things*, and *Hold-
ing fast that which is Good*: Or, in other
Words

of Searching out Truth, &c.

3

Words, searching out the Truth; and Discourse adhering to it, when we have found it. I.

I shall first consider them separately; and then shew the Connexion between them, or the Influence which the One has upon the Other. The former Point will, I presume, be sufficiently discuss'd in These Five following Particulars.

I. The *Object*, or the Things to be proved.

II. The *Persons* who are to prove them.

III. The *Measure*, or *Degree* of proving.

IV. The *Duty* of so proving: And,

V. The *Rule*, or *Rules*, by which the Proof is to be made.

1. *First* then, as to the *Object*; The Expression of the Text is as extensive as can be imagined: *Prove all things*. But common Reason tells us, that This cannot be understood Literally; not all things strictly speaking; That being both unnecessary, and impossible: But all things which we have occasion to Try and Examine, in order to our Happiness. In the Words immediately preceding, the Apostle gives us This Precept, *Despise not Prophesyings*: It appears therefore from the Coherence, that the Things he advises us to prove are Matters of Religion; not

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all Things of any Nature whatsoever, but different Religions, different Interpretations of Scripture, and the like. And even here it is necessary to observe, that we may in Sum and Substance, and in the full Import of St. Paul's Precept, *prove all things*, without running over the particular Detail of all the Religions, Pagan, Jewish, Mahometan, and all the various Subdivisions of them, together with all the Heresies, and Diversity of Opinions which are, or ever have been, in the World: This would be endless, and is altogether needless. If we thoroughly, and clearly, by urging all the Arguments for it, and answering all the Objections against it, *prove our own Religion* to be *true*; we at the same time, and by necessary Consequence, *prove all others* to be *false*: Because they are contradictory to it, and inconsistent with it: And the same is to be said of *particular Doctrines*, among Those who profess Christianity. To shew other Religions and Opinions to be false, is indeed a great *Confirmation* of our own, even after we have sufficiently demonstrated the Truth of it: And accordingly, Learned Divines have not only established the Christian Religion upon the clearest and strongest Arguments; but have also abundantly shewn the

False-

of Searching out Truth, &c.

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Falshood and Absurdity of all others. Discourse

But tho' This be *very convenient*, it is by I.

no means *absolutely necessary*: Because, as I said, if we prove our own to be true, we of course prove all others to be false. This Remark I thought proper to be made; because it removes the main Stumbling-Block which lies in our way, at the first reading of my Text. *Prove all things*? How is it possible for every particular Christian to enquire into all Religions, and Opinions in Religion? I answer; Neither is it necessary, nor here commanded: But, in This Case, we *prove all things* by thoroughly and substantially *proving one thing*. It is very proper indeed for Men of a learned and religious Profession, to expose the Falshood and Folly of all other Persuasions; all I mean, which are considerable enough to be taken notice of: Nay, it is little less than necessary to disprove the *most considerable* false Religions, and Opinions: But then they may be reduced to few Heads; and Those being Confuted, the rest either fall of course, or are too ridiculous, and unintelligible, to be regarded.

2. We are in the next place to consider the *Persons* who are Thus to prove things. Now These (according to some Interpreters) are only the *Pious*, or (as Others

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I.

Hebr. v.

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love to call them) the *Elect*: These only, say they, are competent Judges of Religious Matters; These only having *their Senses exercised to discern Good and Evil*; as the Apostle expresses it. But This certainly is a strange Exposition: For, 1st, Who are Those Pious, Those *Elect*? How shall we know them? Nay, how will they be always sure to know Themselves? For I fear there is a Danger of their being partial in their Judgment. 2^{dly}, Therefore, tho' *all Things*, strictly speaking, are not here intended to be *proved*; yet *all Persons*, strictly speaking, have a *right to prove*. For who are to be excluded? Or who has Authority to exclude them? And what Right has any Person whatsoever to hinder another from making use of the Reason which God has given him; especially in Matters of the utmost Moment and Concern? But, 3^{dly}, Tho' all have a *Right* to prove these things; yet all have not *Ability*. For is every ignorant and illiterate Person sufficiently qualify'd to interpret the Scriptures, to argue, and to judge of Truth and Falshood, in Matters which require Clearness of Reasoning, and Depth of Learning? Nothing like it: Let them therefore of themselves enquire and examine as far as they are able; and employ their own

Ta.

of Searching out Truth, &c.

Talents, as far as they will go: For the Discourse
rest, they must submit to be informed ^L
by their Teachers; by Those who have
both Power, and Authority, to instruct
them. And when they do This; they
make a true use of their own Reason,
and yield as rational an Assent as any be-
longing to the Understanding: Of which
more, in a more proper Place.

3 The Third Thing to be consider'd,
is the *Measure and Degree* of Proving. It
is not a superficial View, a slight, cursory
Examination, that will be sufficient.
Scepticism very often puts on the Appear-
ance of *Trying and Enquiring*: But tho'
it be the easiest thing in the World to *Ca-
vil*, it is not so very easie to *Prove*. Now
some Men enquire, not to be convinced,
but purely to find fault: And therefore
it is not their business to go to the bot-
tom of things, but only to pick Holes
in the Surface, and with a little Wit to
do a great deal of Mischief. I am at the
same time very sensible, that such a light
desultory Examination does not *always*
proceed from a Sceptical Temper, nor
from any ill Design against Religion; but
very often from pure Laziness, when a
Man does not care to be at the pains of
making an accurate Enquiry. To ob-
viate Both therefore, the Enquiry must
be

Discourse be made *honestly*, and *thoroughly*; thoroughly, I mean, if the Person concerned be capable of it: Otherwise, he must submit to the Judgment of his Instructors, as I before observed.

4. The *Duty* of Thus proving things (which was the Fourth Point I proposed to consider) is so evident both from Scripture and Reason; that a few Words upon it will be sufficient. Besides the express Command of my Text, our Blessed Saviour lays the same Injunction upon us; John vii. 24. *Judge not according to the Appearance, but judge righteous Judgment.* And in another place; Luke xii. 57. *Tea, and why even of your selves judge ye not what is right? Examine your selves* (says St. Paul) *whether ye be in the Faith:* And 2 Cor. xiii. 5. *St. John, Believe not every Spirit, but try the Spirits.* Without understanding our Religion, we can never live, as we should do, according to its Precepts. To what purpose were our rational Faculties given us, if not to be employed, and especially in Matters of the highest Importance; And how Criminal, as well as Foolish, must it be, to make no use of such precious Talents, when our Happiness or Misery is the question? If therefore it be our *Duty* thus to Try and Examine; we may argue *a fortiori* that it is *Lawful*. How obvious then, how unavoidable is the

of Searching out Truth, &c.

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the Reflection which we must make upon the Church of *Rome*; according to whose Doctrine, it is unpardonable for Men to see with their own Eyes, and understand with their own Reason? Had *Moses* dealt thus with *Korah* and his Followers, their Defection had been no Rebellion; but they might then have justly used the Expostulation which they actually did use; *Wilt thou put out the Eyes of these Men?*

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I.

We will not come up. I proceed now to the Fifth and Last Thing I proposed to consider under this First General Head; viz.

Numb.

xvi. 14.

5. The Rule, or Rules, by which the Proof is to be made. As This Point is the most difficult and important of all, it requires the longest and most distinct Examination. I said *Rule*, or *Rules*; because we may consider either the *General* One, which includes all the rest; and That is *Right Reason* in its widest Sense: Or more particularly, Those comprehended under it, which are *Reason*, *Scripture*, and the *Authority of the Church*. Here *Reason* is used in a narrow Signification, as distinct from the other Two. For taking it, as I said, in its *Widest* Notion, it includes every thing that can be a *Rule* to us in judging of Truth and Falshood. Thus, always when we are directed by the *Scriptures*, and very often when we are directed by mere

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mere *Human Authority*, we act according to *Reason*, in the largest Acceptation; because *Reason* tells us we should be so directed; as I shall shew hereafter. But here, in its *limited* Sense, we consider it as distinct from *Scripture*, and *Authority*; and mean by it, the Judgment which a Man makes purely of himself, from the *Nature and Connexion of Things*, as they appear to his own *Understanding*, abstracted from any *Authority*, either *Divine*, or *Human*. By which soever of These Rules we proceed, This is an unfailing Maxim; That there can be no rational Assent, where there is no Proof. And This affects the Case of our *modern false Prophets*; who have produced no Proof to support their Pretensions; unless Confidence, and Self-contradiction, may be allowed to pass for Evidence. Another sure Maxim is This; That side of the Question is to be held, which has the most Evidence, and the fewest Difficulties. For that there should be *some Difficulties*, is no reasonable Objection: And a Man may as well say he will chuse no *State of Life* which has any *Inconveniences*, as that he will assent to no *Proposition* which has any *Difficulties*. To discuss all These Points at large, is not my Business at present: Most of them I shall copiously consider in

of Searching out Truth, &c.

I I

in other Discourses. To mention them Discourse I.
here was however necessary; in order to give us a clear view of Things, and to shew the Dependence they have upon each other. But the Third Rule I took notice of, *viz. Ecclesiastical Authority*, shall now be more fully and particularly spoken to; because many Objections have lately been raised against it, especially with regard to the Imposing of *Creeds, Articles, and Subscriptions*.

I answer then; That the Imposing of them is necessary, for the Peace of the Church, and the Instruction of its Members. Nor is it any real Hardship upon us, nor any Hindrance to the Freedom of Thinking, truly and properly so called: It is an Hindrance indeed to the *Libertinism*, but not to the *Liberty*, of Thinking. The Scriptures are the Rule of Faith; but they are not always easy to be understood: And where is the mighty Hardship of being instructed by Those who have both Ability, and Authority, to instruct us? And Who have so much of Both, as the united Wisdom, and Learning, of the Governours of the Church, assembled in a Synod? How can we yield a more reasonable, and consequently a more free Assent, than by submitting our own pri-

Discourse private Judgments to Theirs? The Scriptures are the Rule of Faith: So are the Laws of the Land the Rule of our civil Obedience; but they are often difficult, and capable of various Interpretations: And what have private Subjects to do, but to acquiesce in the Decision of the Legislature; or, if That be silent, in the Decision of the Judges, who are the proper Interpreters of Those Laws? Yes; but Fathers and Councils have often erred, differed among themselves, and violently contradicted one another; and our own Church declares them not to be Infallible. So do Judges very frequently differ among themselves in point of Law, (much oftner, by the way, than Divines of the same Church do in point of Divinity;) so do Laws themselves very frequently contradict, and repeal, each other; nor did I ever hear that either the Judges, or the Legislature, pretended to Infallibility: And yet I think This is not commonly urged as an Argument either against asking the Opinion of the Judges, or submitting to the Authority of the Legislature. If it were; I believe more Notice would be taken of it, than seems to be taken of the Objections against Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction. What if Councils in several Churches, and Ages, have concluded contrary to one an-

another? Still *Our own Church*, of which *We* are Members, and to whose Authority *We* are Subject, ought to conclude *Us*: This Guide, tho' not Infallible, is the best we have, in Understanding the Scriptures; and therefore, at least, and to put it at the lowest, ought to determine us for want of a better.

Nor is the Case at all Parallel between Us, and the Church of *Rome*; as it has been, and still is, most falsely and maliciously insinuated. Private Judgment is not by us *set aside*; but only taught to *submit* to the publick Judgment, in Matters of an *abstruse* and *difficult* Nature. Their peculiar Doctrines are *manifestly contrary* to Scripture, in the plainest and most important Instances, even in Practice, as well as Faith: And the most ignorant Person that can read, and say the Ten Commandments, has Apprehension enough to perceive it. But here all the Doctrines controverted among Us are confessed on all hands to be *obscure*, and *hard to be understood*: And therefore our private Sentiments ought to be over-ruled by the Decision of our Superiours concerning them. Should a Judge, nay should all of them together (could such a Thing be conceived possible) tell a private Person that *Murder* and *Robbery* are law-ful;

Discourseful; Every body would have too much

I. Understanding to be misled by them:  But should they give their Opinion concerning a *doubtful Point of Law*, in which they should be consulted; in This Case to refuse their Decision would be as great Folly, as in the Other to admit it.

Nothing in the World therefore can be more rational, than to submit our Opinions to Those, who must be presumed to understand the Matter in Debate better than Our selves. For however *Reason* and *Authority* have been set at Variance by some Men; nothing is more certain (as I hinted above) than that being convinced by *Authority*, we may *ipso facto* be convinced by *Reason*; because the latter may, and often does, dictate to us that we ought to be directed by the former. It is true indeed, the *last Result* of a Man's Enquiry, or That which *immediately* determines his Assent must be the Appearance of Things to his own Judgment: But then That Appearance may be made several ways; either from the Nature of the Things themselves, or from the Opinion and Determination of other Men. So that These Opposers of *Authority*, and pretended Advocates for *Reason*, might have spar'd That wise Observation of theirs which they are perpetually repeating, and which

which No body among Us denies, That Discourse we may as well see with other People's Eyes, as understand with other People's Reason: Because we may really judge for *Our selves*, by *submitting our own Judgments* to Those of Others; our own Reason telling us that *we ought to do so*: The not distinguishing of which has been the Occasion of all This Fallacy, and of so many very idle and frivolous Objections.

But still it is urged, That they who ought to direct us, differ among themselves. They? Who? Particular Persons may; but the Articles, and Those who compiled them, are very well agreed. And as to what we are told by Some, that the Articles in These Things are as difficult and indeterminate as the Scriptures, nay sometimes much more so; it must be a sufficient Answer at present (because there can be no other) to say, This is notoriously false in Fact; and for the Proof we must refer our selves to the Judgment of any unprejudiced Person, who will examine Both, and make the Comparison between them. Such a one will soon perceive, and confess, that Doctrines which lie diffuse, scattered, and disjointed, in the Scriptures, are collected and reduced to Propositions, in the Articles; and if even in *These* some of them

Discourse them are Obscure (as by the Nature of
 I. the Subjects they must necessarily be)
 they are however much more so in *Those*.
 If then it be enquired, how shall private
 unlearned Persons be determined with re-
 gard to Difficulties which still remain
 even in the Definitions and Explanations
 of the Church; the Answer is ready:
 They must be concluded by the Judgment
 of particular Divines, the most Skilful and
 Learned they can apply to. If it be still
 ask'd, Who are They? The Reply is as
 easy; *Those*, in all probability, who are
 by common Repute esteemed to be so.
 I say in all probability; for here likewise
 we do not pretend to be Infallible: But
 we must proceed upon *probable* Evidence,
 when we can have *no better*. In These,
 and in all other, Points relating not only
 to Faith, but to Practice, such for Ex-
 ample as are commonly called *Cases of*
Conscience, or Doubts concerning the Law-
 fulness or Unlawfulness of Actions, we
 must be directed by the Decision of Di-
 vines. And if they *differ in their Opinions*;
 we must be guided by *Those* of whom
We our selves have the *best Opinion*:
 Only ever having a more especial Re-
 gard to Him, who has the immediate
 Care of our Souls. For the rest, to ask
 whom, or how many, we should con-
 sult,



sult, is the same as to ask how many
Lawyers, or Physicians, we should consult,
in Cases relating to Their respective Fa-
culties. The Answer is plain in all Three;
Such, and so many, as it is most conve-
nient to consult: And in That our own
Reason, and Experience, must direct us.
Nor can it be said, That the Case in Di-
vinity differs from the other Two, be-
cause our Souls are of infinitely greater
Concern, than our Bodies, or Estates:
This alters not the Case; since in This, as
well as in the other Two, we make use
of the *only Means* appointed us: And we
are in the right by acting according to the
Instruction given us, even though the Per-
son, or Persons who instructed us, were in
the wrong: And that for This plain Rea-
son, because we procured the best Infor-
mation we could; and consequently did
all that was required of us; God Himself
having appointed no other Means, than
Those we made use of. And here if the
Person who asks Advice be *capable* of un-
derstanding the *Reasons* of the Decision, he
must have Those Reasons laid before him:
If he be not, he must submit *implicitly*
even to the Judgment of *Men*: And in ei-
ther Instance he thinks very *Freely*, because
he thinks *Rationally*; which he does, by
thinking as well as he can for Himself,
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Discourse

I.



and then calling in the Aid of Others to supply his Defects. A Man who *sees* perfectly well, has no Occasion to have his Opticks assisted : But Those, with whom it is otherwise, have Glasses to help them to read, or Guides to help them to walk ; and that without the least Reflection upon the *Freedom* of their *Eyesight*.

This, I think, is a clear State of the Case concerning *Reason* and *Authority*, as compared with each other ; and of the Rules which the First directs us to proceed by, in consulting the Last : I have considered it, though briefly, yet somewhat distinctly ; because I take it to be a Subject of very great Importance, though very little regarded.

But our discontented Arguers proceed ; and tell us, that in *Articles* and *Creeeds*, &c. the Church has introduced Terms not to be found in the Scriptures, and multiplied Definitions, and Forms of Speaking. This they continually Object ; and they may as well Object against the Expounding, Interpreting, or Declaring of Any thing whatsoever : The Explanation must have more Terms than the Thing explained ; otherwise it would be an Explanation to very little purpose. If they can prove that the Sense of These Terms which offend them is contrary to Scripture,

pture, or even not to be proved from it; Discourse
they will say something to the purpose: I.
But all short of This is mere Cavil, and
Fallacy: Especially, if we have a due re-
gard to the Authority of the Church, and
the Reasonableness and Duty of submit-
ting to it in Things difficult and abstruse;
as I have before particularly consider-
ed it.

As to the Exacting of *Subscriptions*;
it is necessary, as was said, in order to
preserve Peace and Unity in the Church.
And if Those of whom they are required
believe the Doctrines; Why do they
Scruple? If they do not; Why do they
Subscribe? And as for the Sense in which
they are to be taken; If they are not
clear and plain, the Subscriber has the
more Latitude: If the Articles do not
define Things, there is no more to be
said; neither do we: It is here, as it is
in Law; *Ubi Lex non distinguit, neque
nos distinguere debemus.* But if they do
clearly, expressly, plainly, define, and de-
clare; we must take them in That plain
Sense, not by forced unnatural Construc-
tions distinguish it away, and impose
one of our own in its stead, directly con-
trary to it; and so subscribe not *to*, but
against the Articles, not to *their* Sense,
but *our own*; which we cannot do, with-

Discourse
I. out the most shameful Prevarication, and virtual Perjury. And if it be demanded, Who shall be Judges of the Sense of the Church in These her Declarations ; I answer, Common Reason, and the Consciences of the Subscribers.

Nor is it at all *unjust* or *unreasonable* for the Church to *punish* Those who first publickly Subscribe to her Doctrines, and afterwards as publickly Deny them. Nay, This is no Hardship, even if they deny them purely upon a Principle of Conscience ; (could That be supposed possible, while they pretend to assent to them :) Because it is agreeable to the strictest Equity that the Opinion of Publick Authority should be preferred to That of Private Persons ; and then that Private Persons should suffer, rather than the Publick. But besides ; a vast Majority of Christians all over the World, and particularly the main Body of our own Church, not only believe the Doctrines which are now by Some denied, but judge it Impious and even Blasphemous to deny them : And consequently think it Their Duty to punish Those Opposers, as much as the Latter can think it Theirs to make That Opposition : For it is to be hoped, Hereticks are not the only Persons who have any Conscience among us. How much
foever

soever therefore the Authority of the ^{Discourse} Church, Synods, Councils, and Fathers, ^{I.} has of late been decry'd by some Men, even by Some, though, God be praised, but a Few, who (to their Shame be it spoken) are by their Office and Function particularly obliged to defend them: How much soever the Notions of *Heresy* on the one hand, and of *Orthodoxy* on the other, have been exploded and laughed to Scorn by profane Writers; one of them, by way of Ridicule, dissuading us from the *Study of the Holy Scriptures* themselves: It will ever appear reasonable to an impartial Enquirer, that Those who lived nearest to the Times of Christ and his Apostles, must be best qualified to inform us in many Things; that the Church has, and ought to have, an Authority in expounding obscure Passages of Scripture, and fixing the Sense of difficult Points in Divinity; that there is no Absurdity in the Word *Heresy* used to signify a Doctrine contrary to the Word of God, as interpreted by the Church, and pertinaciously insisted upon, in opposition to Both; and that, after all the little Raillery of Those who are Wise or Witty in their own Conceits, the *Orthodox* Christian is the *best*, the *truest*, and therefore in propriety of Speech the *freest*, Thinker.

Discourse

I.



II. Having Thus dispatch'd the former Part of the Text, *Prove all Things*; I proceed now to the latter, *Hold fast that which is good*. And here we shall consider,

1. The Duty it self. And,
2. Some Difficulties, or Exceptions which are made concerning it.

1. For the First; The Expression, *Holding fast*, may imply Two Things, both absolutely necessary; *Firmly Assenting*, and *Firmly Maintaining*: Or in other Words, Being entirely convinced of the Truth, and Never departing from it, after we are so. That Both are, as I said, absolutely necessary, is so evident from Scripture and Reason; that we need not insist long upon the Proof of it. To omit very many Passages of Holy Scripture which might be alledged to This purpose, the Apostle of my Text commands us in

Gal. v. 1. another Place to *Stand fast in the Liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free*. And,

Eph. iv. *That we henceforth be no more like Children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every Wind of Doctrine*. Where we may make one very material Observation by the way, to confirm what was urged in the foregoing Part concerning the Authority of the Church, and the Union and

and Edification of its Members. The Discourse
Context to the Place now cited runs I.
Thus. *And he gave some Apostles, and some
Prophets, and some Evangelists; and some
Pastors and Teachers; for the Perfecting of
the Saints, for the Work of the Ministry, for
the Edifying of the Body of Christ: 'Till we
all come in the Unity of the Faith, and of the
Knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect
Man, unto the measure of the Stature of the
fulness of Christ: And then it immediately
follows; That we henceforth be no more like
Children, &c.* It seems then the *Unity of
the Faith* tends to the *Edifying of the Body
of Christ*; and the Authority of *Pastors
and Teachers* to Both: Creeds, Articles,
and Subscriptions therefore are not such
very absurd Things as some would fain
represent them. But farther: The Ne-
cessity of thus *Holding fast that which is
good*, is as manifest from Reason as from
Scripture: Without This it is (humanly
speaking) impossible we should ever come
to Heaven: We must *be* in the right
way, and *continue* in it too; Otherwise,
how should we arrive at our Journey's
End? Truth is certainly somewhere, or
other; and as certainly capable of being
discovered: But if we do not *adhere* to
it, after we have found it, the Discovery
can be of no use to us, unless it be to

Discourse render us the more inexcusable. All which

I. will be farther cleared and confirmed by
 the Consideration of,

2. The Difficulties, and Exceptions
 which are made concerning it.

1. First then it may be enquired, *How long* must we *prove*, before we *hold fast*? I answer; 'Till we are fully convinced that we are in the Right. But it will be said, the Question recurs; When is That? Many Things are to be considered, and a great Variety of Difficulties to be surmounted; before we can entirely yield our Assent, and acquiesce with Satisfaction. I answer; They are not near so numerous, as it is pretended. The Christian Religion in general (for Example) is established upon the clearest Proof; and the whole Process of the Arguments is simple and unperplexed. And (as I remarked in the other Branch of my Discourse) if we prove our own Religion to be true, we of course prove all others to be false. In like manner, how much Dust soever has been raised about the Divinity of our Saviour by Heretics, and about Episcopacy by Schismatics; let any Person that seriously and impartially reads the Scriptures ask himself, Whether, according to the main Drift and Scope of them, it does not
 plainly

plainly appear that Jesus Christ is truly Discourse
and in the highest Sense God ; whether it I.
is possible for any Expressions to be more
full to That Purpose ; and whether at least
the fewest Difficulties are not of That
Side? Let any one that reads the New Te-
stament, and understands ever so little of
Ecclesiastical History, ask himself whe-
ther the Arguments for Episcopacy, even
from Scripture, do not at least prepon-
derate ; and whether the constant Practice
of the Apostles, of the Primitive Chri-
stians, and of all Christendom for above
Fifteen hundred Years, being added to
Those Arguments, do not put the Matter
beyond all reasonable Doubt or Scruple ?
It were easy to instance in all the main
Controversies that have ever vexed the
World ; but These Specimens may be suf-
ficient. 'Tis not so much the *Difficulty*
of the *Thing*, as the *Laziness* of the *Per-*
sons, that commonly keeps Mens Judg-
ments so long undetermined : They might
be sooner convinced, if they would ; but
they do not care to take Pains enough to
be so. As for the Objection raised from
the Incapacity of Ignorant and Illiterate
Persons ; it has been answered before,
that they have Teachers to instruct them,
and to Their Judgments they must sub-
mit.

2. The

Discourse

I.

2. The Next is the grand and famous Objection of all; which is very much insisted upon, and is as weak a one as could possibly have been thought of. It is This: *Others think themselves in the right, as well as We*; Nay All do: Not only Papists on the one hand, and Presbyterians on the other; but the Turks, Jews, and Heathens, *all sorts* of Infidels, Hereticks, and Schismatics, as well as *Ours*, think, or pretend to think, they are in the Right. But does it therefore follow that they *are* so? This Argument, if it proved *any thing*, would prove that they are *all* in the Right, though they all *contradict one another*; and then they would be strangely in the Right indeed. Because there are Variety of Ways, therefore is there no true one? And when I can prove that I am in the true one; does it follow that I am not so, because others pretend the contrary without proving it? Is there no Truth in the World, because there is much Falsehood? No sound Judgment, because there are many Prejudices? And is our being born in a Country that is in the Right, an Argument that we are in the Wrong; or that we do not know whether we are in the Right or no, after we have sufficiently proved it? What, in the Name of Common Sense, would
These

These People have? No Arguing can possibly be more ridiculous: And yet This Noise without Meaning has turned the Heads of Thousands, and threatens to banish Human Reason out of the World. Had you been born in *Turkey*, say they, you would have been a *Mahometan*: Tho' That is more than any body certainly knows; yet admitting it to be so, What then? Would they therefore have us not *hold fast* our Religion, after we have demonstrated it to be true; because we happened to be Natives of a Country, in which That Religion is established? Or, after having proved our Own to be true, and Theirs to be false; would they have us turn *Turks*, because we were born in *England*; only to shew that we are Free-Thinkers, and not fettered by the *Prejudices* of Education? That we were born in This, or That Religion, is indeed no Argument *for* it; but sure it must be allowed too, that it is no Argument *against* it. The true Religion must be somewhere, or other: If it happens to be in our Country, let us not be angry: If we will not own it to be a Privilege, let us at least bear it with Patience. The only way therefore to talk to the Purpose, is to examine the *Evidence* in any Controversy; to consider not who

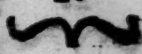
says

I.
~

Discourse says He is in the Right, but who proves

I. He is in the Right ; to fix our own Opinions upon sound Reason, and not to spoil our Understandings with a confused Huddle of Notions about the Opinions of Others.

Since we are upon Objections drawn from *Prejudice* ; I cannot omit One, by the way, which Some think fit to urge even against *Education* it self. All rational Creatures, they say, ought to think for Themselves, and freely to chuse their own Opinions ; and therefore to instil any Principles into the tender Minds of Children, except Those of Knowledge in general, is to instil so many Prejudices ; and that Truth it self is not Truth to Them, if it be imposed upon them by Others, before they are able to make use of their own Judgments. We see to what a refined Pitch of Reasoning our Free-Thinkers would carry us ; even to argue against *Teaching* and *Instruction*, in Matters of the highest Consequence. But their Argument turns upon This false Supposition, that it is possible for the Mind of Man, after it is come to any considerable Use of Reason, to be wholly void of all Moral and Practical Principles : Some Notions, or other, of Religion are natural and unavoidable : And if a Man can, or thinks he can,

can, demonstrate His to be True, why Discourse
may he not teach it to his Children; and I.
be as Free to Prejudice them with Truth 
(if it must be so called) as others will
certainly be to Prejudice them with
Falsehood? Many other Things might be
said in Answer to This Objection; but
the Objection it self is too trivial to be
insisted upon.

3. Though This, which I am going to
mention, be not so important as the for-
mer, yet it seems to be consequent of
it; and therefore shall take its Place in
This Order. The *Liberty of Thinking* I
have often hinted at in This, and other
Discourses: But it is here to be more par-
ticularly considered; because *Holding fast*
that which is Good, is supposed by Some
to be an Impeachment of That Liberty.
Does then the *Freedom of examining* Every
thing consist in *not assenting to Any thing*?
This is just as if, in the Affairs of Trade,
the Liberty of Bargaining consisted in
never coming to any Agreement. The
Apostle says, *Prove all Things; Hold fast*
that which is Good: These Men say, *Ca-*
vil about Every thing, and *hold fast No-*
thing; Or, in a different Expression, be
always Sceptical and Captious; that you
may be supposed to be a Wit by Some,
and a Fool by Others. Am I ever the
less

Discourseless Free in Thinking, because I make
 I. a right Use of my Reason? And do I
 make a wrong Use of That Reason by
 assenting to something, or other, upon
 rational Grounds? Or does *Freedom* con-
 sist purely in *Flattering*? And is a Man
 certainly a *Slave*, because he is at *Rest*?
 The vile Use which was once made of
 This Text, in the Case of what was
 Then called *Occasional Conformity* was just
 glanced at in the Beginning of This Dis-
 course; and is too nauseous to be farther
 considered. The Misery, as well as Fol-
 ly, of Thus floating in Scepticism I shall
 elsewhere * take notice of: And the Ne-
 cessity of insisting upon such Doctrines in
 These Infidel Times, is too evident to
 need any Apology. I only Now observe
 the different Characters of different Per-
 sons, with respect to the Subject upon
 which I have been discoursing. Some
 embrace every thing, and hold fast no-
 thing: Others neither embrace, nor hold
 fast, any thing: Some embrace That which
 is Good, but do not hold it fast: Others
 (who, God knows, are too many) em-
 brace Evil, and hold it fast: A Fifth Sort
 (who are the best, but One) chuse Evil
 at first, but afterwards finally change it

* Discourse II.

for

for Good: And a Sixth (who are the best of all) embrace Good at first, and retain it to the last. Discourse I.

III. I have Thus considered the two Branches of my Text separately, and distinctly by themselves. I shall now at the Conclusion add a few Words (for a few will be sufficient) to shew the Connection between them; or the Influence which the One has upon the Other. If we carefully *prove all things*, in the Sense I have explained it, we cannot well avoid *holding fast that which is Good*: but without the former the latter is scarce possible. If our true Religion, and the most material Errors opposed to it, be thoroughly weighed and examined, we shall of course stedfastly assent to it; For the Mind cannot refuse Truth, when it is duly represented. But without considering the Evidence, or informing our Judgments, we cannot firmly assent to any thing: Or if we do, it is purely accidental: If we are in the Right, it is only by Chance; which indeed, to speak strictly, is impossible: We may by chance embrace That which *in it self* is Right, and with a blind Obstinacy adhere to it; but it is not Right *to us*, unless we rationally know, or believe, it to be so. It is for want therefore of duly Trying and Exa-

Discourse Examining Things, that the Minds of
 I. Men are so roving and unsettled; and,
 even when they are settled, it is generally
 more upon Prejudice, than upon Reason.
 To remedy so great a Mischief; let us
 seriously consider what has been offered
 upon this Subject; That we may be ra-
 tionally Religious, and, in the strictest
 and most proper Sense, be *wise unto Sal-
 vation.*

*The Difficulties in Religion,
and the Scriptures, no Argument
against Either : And the Folly, and
Wickedness, of perverting Those
Difficulties to wrong Purposes.*

2 P E T. III. 16, 17.

— *In which are some Things hard to be
understood ; which they that are unlearned
and unstable, wrest, as they do also the other
Scriptures, to their own Destruction.*

*Ye therefore, Beloved, seeing ye know these
things before ; beware lest ye also, being led
away by the Error of the Wicked, fall from
your own Steadfastness.*

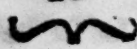
THE former Clause of the Text, Discourse
being an imperfect Sentence, necessarily refers us to the Words preceding it. St. Peter was just before speaking of our Blessed Saviour's Coming to Judgment: And having shewn the Thing it
self to be most certain, though the Time
was doubtful, and perhaps at a distance :

D

He

Discourse

II.



'Ev ois
'Ev cis.

He proceeds Thus, *Ver. 14. Wherefore, Beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him without spot, and blameless. And account that the Long-suffering of our Lord is Salvation; even as our beloved Brother Paul also, according unto the Wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you: As also in all his Epistles, speaking in them of these things. In which are some Things hard to be understood, &c.* Whether the Relative *Which* is to be referred to the Things here spoken of, or to *St. Paul's Epistles*, may admit of a Question: The vulgar Reading makes it respect the first-mentioned, but some particular Copies the last. However it be, the Difference is not material; and the Assertion is true in either Sense: It being undeniable, that both *St. Paul's Epistles* in general, and the Doctrines here mentioned in particular, do really contain *Things hard to be understood*. I shall from the Words take Occasion to discourse upon a Subject of a wider Extent, than Either of Those (which ever it be) which is immediately, and directly, included in them.

I believe it may with Truth be affirmed, That no one Folly whatsoever hath contributed more to the reigning Wickedness of the World; than a certain Levity of Mind, by which Men amuse themselves

No Argument against it.

35

Discourse

II.



selves with the Difficulties of Religion; so as to neglect what is easy and indisputable in it, the main Substance which it contains, and the main Proofs upon which it relies. This kind of Trifling makes Infidels of Some, and very bad Believers of More. This enervates their Vertue, inflames their Passions, corrupts their Wills, and perplexes their Understandings. It so confounds their Ideas, and gives them such a Whirl of Thinking, that they are never settled all their Lives long; but are always like Children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every Wind of Doctrine; ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the Truth. And the Reason of it seems to be This: The Desire of Knowledge, in Those who employ their Intellectual Faculties, is a restless and unquiet Principle; and by This, as well as other Appetites, we are inclined to be always grasping and reaching at Things which we have not, so as to flight and overlook what we actually have. And it is indeed so far laudable; that we ought not to sit down content with the first Rudiments of Instruction, but daily to proceed, and improve in true Knowledge; especially in Religious Matters which are of the utmost Moment and Concern to us. But then we

Eph. v.

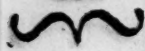
^{14.}

2 Tim. iii.

^{6.}

Discourse

II.



should carefully distinguish between what is capable of being known by us, and what is not; by no means suffering the One to debar us from the Benefit of the Other. I shall therefore at this time endeavour to regulate the Conduct of our Wills and Understandings in This important Affair; and, because it is a Subject of the highest Consequence with regard to our Practice, I shall consider it, though briefly, yet as distinctly as I can, in These Five following Particulars, which seem naturally to rise from the Words before us.

I. *First*, I observe, That there are Difficulties in Religion, *Things hard to be understood*; though not near so many as are sometimes pretended.

II. *Secondly*, I shall enquire in what Sense, and how many Ways, Those Difficulties may be said to be *Wrested*.

III. *Thirdly*, I shall remark upon That Part of the Character here given of Those who so *wrest* them; that they are *unlearned and unstable*: Which I shall make out, by considering *in Point of Reason* the exceeding *Absurdity* of Those Objections which are raised from the Difficulties of Religion.

IV.

IV. *Fourthly*, I shall shew the *Folly* and *Danger* of such Arguing, in relation to *Prædication*; from This Part of their Character, that they *wrest* Those Difficulties to their *own Destruction*, and are *Wicked*, as well as *Foolish*, in so doing.

V. *Fifthly*, and *Lastly*, I shall enforce the Exhortation of the Apostle; That we may not *be led away by This Error of the Wicked*, and fall from our own *Stedfastness*.

I. In the First Place then I observe; That there are Difficulties in Religion, *Things hard to be understood*: Though not near so many as are sometimes pretended. There are two different Sorts of Persons, both Enemies to Religion, who assault it by contrary Methods. Some representing the Difficulties of it as *more*, and *greater*; Others, as *fewer*, and *less*, than they really are. The Former say the Whole is mysterious, unintelligible, inconsistent; there being so much Obscurity, and Diversity of Interpretation, that one knows not what to fix upon, or how to frame a Judgment concerning it. The Latter tell us there are no Mysteries in Christianity, nay no considerable Difficulties; laying it down for a Maxim, that all Matters of Faith

Discourse ought to be plain at first view, and that
 II. to the meanest Capacity. And there-
 fore whenever a Point appears Myste-
 rious or Obscure to Themselves; they go
 a very short way, and, without more Ce-
 remony, reject it, as False and Spurious.
 How False both Those Opinions are, I
 shall shew in its proper Place: At present
 I observe, that the Truth happens to lie
 just between them; There are real Diffi-
 culties in Religion, though not near so ma-
 ny, as Some pretend. In the Phrase of the
 Text it is *expressly asserted*, that *there are*
Difficulties; and *imply'd* that there are *not*
very many: *δυσκότα πνα*, *some Things hard*
to be understood. I shall come to the Proof
 of Particulars under my Third General
 Head, upon which the main Stress of This
 Discourse will turn: I Here only make
 This Observation, as previous, and pre-
 paratory to what follows.

II. The Second Thing I propos'd, was
 to consider, In what Sense, and how
 many Ways, Those Difficulties may be
 said to be *wrested*. The Original Word
σπελάειν signifies either *distorting* a Thing
 contrary to its natural Bent and Tenden-
 cy; or *racking* it so, as to make it speak
 a Sense it knows nothing of. *Easy*, as
 well as *difficult*, Places of Scripture are
 often Thus tormented; which is here im-
 ply'd

ply'd by the Apostle in Those Words, *As* Discourse
they do also the other Scriptures. Some II.
Men find out Ways to prove *their own*
Doctrines, even from Those Texts which
are most plainly and directly levelled
against them; Libertinism of Practice
from St. Paul's Discourses upon Faith,
and the *Duty of Rebellion* from the Thir-
teenth Chapter of the Epistle to the Ro-
mans. But I am now obliged to confine
my self to the *Difficulties* of Religion:
Which we may wrest, either, 1. By per-
verting them to our own preconceived
Opinions: Or, 2. By making them more
difficult than they really are: Or, 3. By
drawing wrong Consequences from them
to the Prejudice of Religion, or of Chri-
stianity, in general. These Particulars are
so plain, that to mention them is suffi-
cient: I only observe, that the Last of them
naturally leads us to the Third Thing I
proposed; *viz.*

III. To remark upon That Part of
the Character here given of Those who
wrest the Things hard to be understood, that
they are *unlearned and unstable*; and to
consider in point of Reason the exceed-
ing Absurdity of Those Objections which
are raised from the Difficulties of Reli-
gion. In giving the Character of such
Men, the Apostle makes no Observation

Discourse

II.


 on the contrary tells us, that they are *unlearned and unstable*; Words, far from flattering the Vanity of Human Understanding. And here by *unlearned* are not meant Those only who have no Learning at all; but also, and indeed chiefly, Those who have some, and not much. The First are commonly Modest, and willing to be Instructed; but the Last are extremely apt to be forward and assuming, and to meddle in Matters which are *too high for them*. They are proud of their little Knowledge; which they would not be of great: For the more a Man truly knows, the more sensible he is of what he does not know. And therefore *Festus* was mistaken in his Reflection upon St. Paul: *Much Learning seldom makes a Man mad*; a Little often does. And hence it is that Those impious Books which are published against Religion, are generally written by Smarters in Science, who have just enough to display their Want of it, to the greater Advantage; just enough to enable them to cavil, and raise small Objections; (the easiest Thing in the World for every Trifler to do :) Objections, from which no Moral Truth, requiring Proof, can be

Pf. cxxxi.

I.

Acts xxvi.

24.

No Argument against it.

41

be entirely free, though it be established upon Demonstration: And so they triumph for a few days, 'till a Person of real Learning comes upon them, and exposes to publick Scorn the miserable Folly and Ignorance, as well as Prophane-ness and Blasphemy, of their boasted Arguments. Of which we have very lately had * such an Instance, as was scarce ever seen in the World before. The other Epithet which the Apostle joins with the former, is *Unstable*. Such Persons are always Sceptical and Cap-
tious; doubtful and uncertain; of a flut-
tering and volatile Temper; catching at Every thing, and adhering to No-
thing: Which proceeds from a great De-
fect of good Sense, Learning, and Reli-
gion. From the plain Words of the
Apostle then may be gathered This Pro-
position; *That thus to wrest difficult Points,*
is an Argument of Ignorance, and Instability.
And This Proposition will be abundantly made out, after we shall have fully considered the Three following Particu-
lars.

1. That the *main Proofs* and *Substance* of our Religion are sufficiently *plain*; and that the *Difficulties* of it are not near so *many*, nor so *considerable*, as Some pre-
tend.

2. That

Discourse

II.

* Phile-
leutherus
Lipfienfis.

Discourse

II.

2. That Those Difficulties which are really in it, are no manner of Argument against it. And,

3. That there are very good Reasons to be given why there should be some Difficulties in Religion; and that they are so far from being an Argument against it, that they are a Confirmation of it.

If These Three Particulars, I say, be clearly made out; all Objections drawn from the *Things hard to be understood* will be cut up by the Roots, and the very Foundations of them entirely overturned.

1. In the First Place then I am to shew, That the main Proofs and Substance of our Religion are sufficiently plain; and that the Difficulties of it are not near so many, nor so considerable, as Some pretend. The Being of God is Matter of clear Demonstration; and the miserable Absurdity and Madnes of all the Cavils against it has been so exposed, that nothing in the World ever appeared more Ridiculous. Then for the Truth of Revealed Religion; That Working by the Power of God is an evident Proof of a Commission from him, is a Proposition which it self needs no Proof: That innumerable

numerable Miracles were wrought by Discourse
Christ, and his Apostles, is Matter of II.
plain Fact, and of human Faith, support-
ed by as much, nay far more Evidence,
than any other Point of History at That
distance of Time; which yet was never
denied, or so much as questioned by any
body. The standing Proofs of it, as the
wonderful Propagation of the Gospel, the
Fulfilling of our Saviour's Prophecies in
the Destruction of *Jerusalem*, and the
Dispersion of the *Jews*, who at this day
are Witnesses of That very Religion which
they deny, are so plain and manifest;
that they are not capable of any Dispute.
As are likewise the wonderful Agreement
between the Old and New Testament,
which, like a Pair of Indentures, answer
to each other; and the Genuineness of
Those Books which are ascribed to the Sa-
cred Writers. The Fall of Man, and the
Original Corruption of Human Nature;
the Redemption of Mankind by Jesus
Christ; the Doctrines of the Trinity, and
Incarnation, and all the Rules of Vertue
and good Living, are as plainly laid down
as Words can express. Nor are there
any Difficulties, which can with any to-
lerable Reason be pretended to overthrow
the *Foundation* of These Doctrines. For
suppose we do not understand the *Manner*
of

Discourse of the Trinity and Incarnation; the

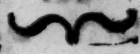
II. *Things Themselves* are as expressly delivered, as Words can convey Things to us: That it is so, is directly revealed; If it be asked, *How* it is so? The Answer is ready, **T H A T** is not revealed. All that we are required to believe, is plain enough; for the rest, *viz.* the Manner, as it is not revealed, so our Faith is not required concerning it. And where is the mighty Hardship of all This? That there is, that there can be, but one God, we can prove by Scripture, at least, if not by Reason: That the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are God, we can prove by Scripture: From whence it follows, that Those Three are That One God. Suppose in another Instance, that there are Difficulties about the Fall of Man, and Original Sin (which indeed are, to my Apprehension, by much the greatest Difficulties in all the Scriptures) and about Foreknowledge in God compared with Free-will in our selves: That our Nature is miserably Corrupt, is but too sadly manifest by Experience: That the Doctrines I just now mentioned are true, is most certain, because we can prove them from the Scriptures; which we can prove to be divinely Inspired. One thing we may be sure of, and That ought to satisfy us;
that

that by the Nature of God, He cannot ^{Discourse} be Unjust, however unaccountable These ^{II.} Things may appear to our shallow Understandings. If his Judgments be a great ^{Pf. xxxvi.} Deep, yet still his Justice standeth like the ^{6.} strong Mountains; and though Clouds and Darkness are round about him, yet Righteous- ^{Pf. xcvi.} ness and Equity are the Habitation of his ^{2.} Seat. It is enough for Us that we are sure a Remedy is prepared for This Distemper, that Means are provided to rectify our corrupt Nature; and if we do not apply them, it is our own Fault.

But here it is carefully to be observed, that Difficulties, as they are managed, are of several Sorts. 1. Those which are really *Nothing in themselves*, but owe all their Force to the *Follies and Thoughtlessness* of Those who *make them*. Thus for Example; They are extremely scandalized at the *Various Opinions* which there are in Religion; never considering, that the main Proofs and Substance of it, as I have shewn, are abundantly plain, and agreed in; and besides, that there is most certainly such a Thing as Truth in the World, though there may be much Falshood and Prejudice. They are moreover exceedingly offended at the *ill Lives* of most Christians, and even of Some whose particular Character and Profes-
sion

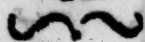
Discourse should oblige them to Holiness.

II. But This Stumbling-Block likewise would be soon removed, would they but consider, 1. That a great part of what is here alledged is not true in Fact; and, by the way, it would be much better if such Persons would reflect more upon their own Lives, and less upon other Peoples. And, 2. If it were all true, yet the Violation or Transgression of a Law is by no means an Argument against That Law. Further, they are staggered at *Heresies*, and Heterodox Doctrines: Which they would not be, did they but once reflect (as they may as often as they please) that were there not some Tenets propagated which are False, the Christian Religion would not be True. Since it is in many Places of Scripture expressly Prophecy'd, That there should be *Apostasy*, *False Prophets*, and *Damnable Heresies*: So far are These Things from being an Objection against Christianity, that they are a direct Confirmation of it, even while they are intended to Overturn it. To give one other Instance; Such Persons as These are wonderfully solicitous about the *State* and *Condition* of the Jews, Pagans, Mahometans, and all other Sorts of *Infidels*: Which Amusement, by the way, often makes

makes them little better than Infidels Discourse
 Themselves. Whereas, did they but II.
 ever so little reflect, they would soon be 
 sensible that This Enquiry is the Thing
 of the World the most Vain and Idle.
 For besides, that it appears from Reason and Scripture, that all Persons, invincibly ignorant of Christianity, will be judged by That Law which they have; and though the best of them can lay no Claim to the Salvation of the Gospel, being not included in the Covenant of Christ; yet the Merits of That Christ will be so far extended even to Them who know him not, as that they shall be Rewarded for living up to the Dictates of their Consciences, and the best of their Knowledge: I say, though This be abundantly probable; yet whether it be, or no, *What is it to Us?* We know *our own* Dispensation, and *our own* Duty; let us stick to That; and for the Case of Others, let us leave it to Him, who made both Us and Them. Sure we are, that to be born under the Gospel, in the midst of the clearest Light, and to be included in the Covenant of Grace, is the greatest Privilege imaginable: But after This, to enquire curiously into the Case of Others, is just as reasonable, as if a Favourite Subject entrusted with particular
In-

Discourse

II.

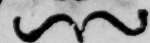
John xxi.
21.

Ver. 22.

Instructions by his Prince, should, instead of Obeying them, spend his Time in Enquiring after another Man's Instructions, which he has nothing at all to do with. Could any of us speak to our Blessed Saviour Himself, and, pointing to a Heathen standing by, ask our Saviour in the Language of St. Peter upon another Occasion, *Lord, and what shall This Man do?* How properly would the same Answer fit the Enquirer, *What is that to Thee? Follow Thou me.* How properly, I say, would That Answer fit him; were it not that he deserved a much severer?

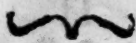
2dly, Another sort of Difficulties are Those which are really *Considerable*, but yet very *capable of being Explained* by Industry, and Application. Of These there are many Instances both in Points of Doctrine, and in Texts of Scripture: They are *hard to be understood*; but still they are *capable of being understood*. It is true, they are difficult: And so are all Languages, all Arts and Sciences, all Trades and Professions, before they are learnt: But then they may be learnt; and actually are so, by Those who diligently apply themselves to the Study of them. And yet nothing is more common than for Those who are not versed in These Matters, to pass very rash Censures upon them.

them. *They* do not understand them, and therefore presently conclude that *Nobody* does. Then out of Pride, or Laziness, or Both, they acquiesce in their own Ignorance; and, to excuse it, alledge that These Places are inconsistent, or unintelligible: And so the Scriptures must bear the blame of the Vices and Follies of Those who read them. Whereas in truth, the Discoveries which have been made by learned Divines in Interpreting the abstruse and seemingly inexplicable Places of Holy Scripture, are wonderful and astonishing. Many Things, which seemed impossible to be understood, have been made as clear as the Sun at Noon-day: And gradual Discoveries have been in different Ages, and still are, made of them, some by one, and some by another; not only in the darkeſt Parts of *St. Paul's* Epistles here mentioned by *St. Peter*, but in all the other Books both of the Old and New Testament, both as to Points of Doctrine, and Matters of Fact, to the History of Things paſt, and Prophecies of Things to come. To give an Instance or two out of many: The Account of the Seventy Weeks revealed by the Angel to *Daniel*, with relation to the Time of the *Messiah*, has been juſtly reckoned one of the moſt obſcure Paſſa-

Discourse
II.


Discourse

II.



ges in all the Holy Scriptures ; and yet it has been very much cleared by the Labours of Expositors, especially by Two most Learned Divines of our own Church. Nay it is observable, that even That so much despaired-of Book, the *Revelation*, though it be embarrass'd with Difficulties not yet accounted for, yet contains many Things as plain Prophecies, and as plainly fulfilled, as can well be imagined. The great Dragon that persecuted the Woman with her Child, the Flood that he cast out of his Mouth after her ; the other Woman of a different Character, who was drunk with the Blood of the Saints, &c. are manifest Predictions of the great Defection and Apostasy from the Church, of the Deluge of Heresies, and other Corruptions, which overspread it, of the Inundation of Arianism, Mahometism, and Popery, and of the cruel Persecutions which the true Disciples of Christ have underwent, partly from Heathens, and partly from false Christians. Very many Instances of the same kind might be given ; did either the Time permit, or the Nature of the Subject require.

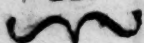
But, 3^{dly}, Another sort of *real Difficulties* are Those which are not yet wholly understood by us ; and which with all our

our Industry we are not able to explain : Discourse
Such as the Trinity, Incarnation, the II.
Fall of Man, Original Sin, and some
others. For that there are Some such as
These, we readily grant: But then even
These are no manner of Argument against
our Religion; which was the Second
Point I proposed to speak to. And the
Truth of it will abundantly appear; if
we duly consider These Two Particu-
lars.

1. That there are very great *Difficul-
ties*, nay *Mysteries*, not only in *Religion*,
but in *Every thing* which the Mind of
Man is conversant about: In all Profes-
sions, in all Parts of Philosophy, in all
Arts and Sciences, nay in the most ob-
vious and common Objects both of the
Understanding, and of the Senses. Of
These I shall produce many Instances in
my next Discourse, and shall not now
insist upon them: Nor indeed is there
any Occasion for it; since in truth
there is no one Thing whatsoever, whe-
ther it be Body, or Spirit, in Our selves,
or in Other Beings, whose Nature and
Manner of Existence we fully under-
stand. Why then should not Religion be
allowed to have some Difficulties, as well
as Every thing else? And why should
Mystery be an Objection against That
E 2 only?

Discourse

II.



only? Especially if we consider in the Second Place,

2. That from the Nature of the Things compared with our Understandings, it is *particularly necessary that there should be Difficulties in Religion, more than in other Matters.* The Things are *Divine*, the Understandings are *Human*; and is it to be wondered that God's Thoughts are above Ours? If (as we have seen in the foregoing Particular) we have a most imperfect Knowledge even of sensible Objects, which continually lie before us; how is it possible that we should be acquainted with *the deep Things of God*, which the *Angels themselves desire to look into*? Hardly (as the Wise-man elegantly observes) we guess aright at Things that are upon Earth, and with Labour do we find the Things that are before us; but the Things that are in Heaven who hath searched out? How can we think it hard that the Trinity and Incarnation should be *Mysterious*; since they belong to the *Divine Nature*, which is in it self *Mysterious*, even setting aside Those Doctrines; and would have been so, if Those Doctrines had never been revealed? For I would willingly ask the Man who declares he has no Notion of Three Persons in the Godhead, What Notion he has of a *Self-Existent*,

wisd. ix.
16.

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No Argument against it.

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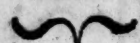
Existent, Eternal, Infinite Being? Of a Discourse
Being which never begun, and never If.

shall end; which had it self no Cause, and is the Cause of Every Thing, but it self? I would ask such a Man, I say, Whether he *fully understands* These Things; and whether his *Ideas* (to use the Terms in which he so much rejoices) be so very *clear, distinct, and adequate*? And yet that there is, that there must be, an Infinite Eternal Being, or there could never have been Any Being at all, is no less than Demonstration: Which many of Those who deny the Trinity do readily acknowledge; though they altogether as little comprehend the *Manner* of the One, as of the Other. That *there is a God* we demonstrate by *Reason*; but *How He is* we know not: That *there is a Trinity* we prove from *Scripture*; but *How it is* we know not: And why *This* should involve more Absurdity or Difficulty than *That*, I am not able to comprehend. Upon the same Foundation then that they deny the Three Persons, they may as well deny the One God: There is the same Reason for Both; that is to say, no Reason for Either.

In These Points therefore of the Trinity and Incarnation, the Subject is the Nature of God; which in all Views will

Discourse

II.



to us be ever incomprehensible: And consequently it is no Wonder there should be Mysteries concerning it. For how can it be conceived that a Finite should comprehend an Infinite? And how then can Human Understanding comprehend the Divine Nature? What the Advocates of Popery therefore urge upon This Subject, to justify their monstrous Doctrine of Transubstantiation, is almost as absurd as That Doctrine it self. You believe some Mysteries, say they; and why not others? Why not Transubstantiation, as well as the Trinity? We answer; *1st*, Because the One is very frequently and plainly revealed in Scripture, the Other not at all. *2^{dly}*, Because the One is not contradictory either to Reason, or our Senses; the Other is contradictory to Both. In the Doctrine of the Trinity it is not said that Three are One, speaking of the same Thing, or Respect; Not that Three Persons are One Person, or Three Gods One God; which would be a Contradiction indeed; but that Three Persons are One God, or (which is the same, though more plainly expressed) that in the Unity of the Godhead Three Persons are included; which is no Contradiction, nor any thing like it. But it is a thorough one, to say that a Piece of Bread is a Human Body; or that

that the same Human Body can be in ten thousand different Places, nay all over the World, at the same time. But the Answer which more particularly relates to our present Purpose, is This: In the latter Instance, the Subject before us is not only a Finite Being, but an Object of our Senses; the outward Qualities of which we so plainly perceive, and know, that if we cannot be sure of These Things we can be sure of Nothing; but in the former, the Subject of our Thoughts is the Nature of God, which, let us take it how we will, is Infinite, Invisible, Incomprehensible; and consequently it is no wonder that there should be Mysteries concerning it.

Must we not then *understand* what we *believe*? I answer; It is necessary to *apprehend* it, but not to *comprehend* it; or, in other Words, to know *Something* of it, but not *Every thing*. For if the Latter were necessary, it would follow that we know *Nothing*: There being nothing in Nature (as I above observed) that we *fully understand*. And to believe a Thing upon God's Word, though we do not fully understand it, is so far from being a Hardship upon us; that we continually yield such an Assent to One another. In all Studies, Arts, and Sciences, nothing is

Discourse more usual, nor indeed more rational, than
 II. to consult Those who are reputed to be
 skilled in them : And upon Their Authority we are satisfied that such a particular Point is as They say ; though we our selves are not able to prove, and do not clearly understand it.

But still it is urged that we ought at least to understand the *Terms* of the Proposition to which we assent : And so we do ; as well in This Case, as in many Others ; not only in Philosophy, but in Things of a less abstracted Nature. The Words, *One* and *Three*, it is to be hoped, are plain enough ; nor is the Term *God* more difficult here, than any where else : The main Quarrel therefore is at the Word *Person* ; which indeed has been the Subject of much impertinent Wrangling. And yet let any Man sincerely ask himself, whether he has not as clear an Idea annexed to That Word, as to many Others which he continually uses, not only in the Sciences, but in common Discourse ? I say, *as clear* : For it is not pretended that it is *entirely so*. But then That Doctrine which has been advanced by Some, that we cannot rationally assent to any thing, unless our Ideas are perfectly clear, adequate, and distinct, is a most false Assertion ; as appears

pears by Experience to All who reflect Discourse
upon the Workings and Operations of II.
their own Minds: Which will inform

them that they yield an Assent, and that a most reasonable one too, even when their Notions are confused, inadequate, and obscure; and indeed if it were otherwise, it would follow that we can know Nothing, unless we knew All things. The Reason why we make use of the Word *Person* in This Article of our Faith, is a very plain one; *viz.* because Personal Attributes are in Scripture perpetually ascribed to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost distinctly; and because That very Word is used upon This Occasion by the inspired Writer; who styles the Son *the* Heb. i. 3. *Brightness of his Father's Glory, and the express Image of his PERSON.*

The Truth is, it may very well be admired that These Doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation have in all Ages of the Gospel embroiled the Christian World so much as they have done: When in reality there is, with respect to our Faith, no material Difficulty about them. I say *with respect to our Faith*; For that they are *hard*, nay by us *impossible* to be explained, we readily acknowledge. But that we cannot *explain* a Mystery, is one thing; that we cannot *rationally believe* it, is

Discourse is another: And though we may not
 II. fully understand *WHAT* we believe; yet
 we may fully understand *WHY* we believe. And That is the very Case now before us. The Points we are upon are as plainly delivered in the Scriptures, as any thing in them: And that we do not thoroughly comprehend them, is no reasonable Objection; because (as I observed before) in our common Intercourse among One another we continually believe Things even upon Human Testimony, which we do not understand: And it is very hard if God's Word will not go as far with us, as Man's.

Nor are the Doctrines we have been considering, purely *Speculative*, as our pretended *Free-Thinkers* love to call them: Though if they *were*, That would be nothing to the purpose, since they are revealed by God as the Objects of our Faith; and if it be His Pleasure that we believe some Things of a Speculative Nature, how dare We dispute it? But besides, I say, These Points are not purely Speculative; They are in a great measure Practical; They have a direct relation to our Practice; And if they have not as direct an *Influence* upon it, the Fault is our own. From Them we may prove the infinite Malignity of Sin, and God's

irre-

irreconcilable Hatred to it; since no Discourse
less a Propitiation than That of his **II.**
only-begotten Son, uniting his Divine
Nature with our Human, could satisfy
his Justice, and put us in a Capacity of
Salvation: And if This be not a practical
Point, and that too of the utmost Mo-
ment imaginable, I know not what to
call so.

But still we are told by Some, that the
Vulgar, and the most *Ignorant* and *Illite-
rate* Persons have Souls to be saved, as
well as the *Learned*; and therefore if These
Things were necessary to be believed,
they would be plain and *easy to the mean-
est Capacity*. This they frequently urge:
And they may with just the same Reason
insist upon it, that all Men ought to
be born Mathematicians, Philosophers,
Lawyers, and Statesmen, as well as Di-
vines. The meanest Capacities, if they
please, ought to be, and may be, *instructed*
in Every thing they are concerned to
know; but it is not necessary they
should know it *of themselves*; Or if they
did, I believe there would be no great
difference between the meanest Capacity,
and the greatest. They are to be taught,
if they please; and there is a particular
Order of Men set apart by Almighty
God to teach them: And That sure is suf-
ficient;

Discourse ficient; but that they should understand

II. Every thing in the Scriptures by their own proper Lights, and that too at first Reading, is by no means absolutely requisite.

But after all that has been, or can be, said; Some will insist upon it, that Christianity is in no part *Mysterious*: And yet we have shewn, that *Every thing* else is so in some respect or other; and why Religion alone should be excepted, is itself a *Mystery*. The truth is, Those Men who are so irreconcilable to These difficult Doctrines, make the Gospel in general ten times more difficult than *Those Doctrines*: By denying all Mysteries in any Part, they make an entire Mystery of the Whole: For in Faith, as well as Practice, we may *strain at a Gnat, and swallow a Camel*; Which indeed is the Case of the Persons of whom we are now speaking. They cannot admit of the Trinity and Incarnation; though asserted in Scripture over and over, as plainly as Words can be spoken: And though (as I said) Those Points relate to the Divine Nature, which itself is incomprehensible. But they can digest a thousand gross Absurdities in expounding away the plain Meaning of the many Texts in which Those Points are delivered: They have no Notion of
an

an *unintelligible Doctrine*, but a very good Discourse
one of an *unintelligible Gospel*: They re- II.
quire of Us a determinate Meaning in
our Words, but will not allow their Sa-
viour to have any Meaning at all in His;
unless it be to mean just contrary to what
he speaks. These are the Men of Criti-
cism; so regular in their Thinking, and
so exact in their Language; who by de-
nying the Honour due to their Redeemer
as God, endeavour to make him appear
like an Impostor as Man.

To object therefore against Christiani-
ty, upon the account of some Difficulties
in it, is most unreasonable and injurious.
Since the main Proofs and Substance of it
are sufficiently easy; we must not con-
clude from particular Difficulties con-
tained in the Holy Scriptures, but from
the main Drift and Tendency of Them;
and believe the Whole, though we do not
understand every Part. We should pro-
ceed upon the irrefragable Evidences
which demonstrate the Scriptures in
general to be the Word of God: When
That is done, all other Difficulties vanish
of course, or at least are easily surmount-
ed by That over-ruling Consideration.
Both in Matters of Faith, and Practice,
we ought not to argue Thus; Such or
such a Thing is reasonable, therefore God
has

Discourse has probably revealed it: but Thus; God

II. has certainly revealed it, and therefore it is reasonable; and whether it seem so to us, or no, it ought to be believed, or obeyed. This is the truest way of Arguing; because we have sufficient and uncontestable Evidence of what He has revealed; far better than we have to convince us that we are right in our Judgments concerning what is, or is not, agreeable to Reason. And then we are very sure of These Two Things; that it is rational to obey, and believe God, whatever He commands, or asserts; and that God cannot impose upon us any thing irrational. The only Questions to the purpose therefore in the Case before us, are These; Are such or such Things in the Scriptures? Is This or That the Meaning of it? And are not the Scriptures the Word of God? All besides These, are Idle and Impious Enquiries. Here indeed I am sensible that many little Objections, or Cavils rather, are made about the Scriptures themselves; about the trivial Matters, obscure Texts, Repetitions, Incoherencies, various Readings, different Senses, seeming Inconsistencies, and the like, contained in them: All which have been fully answered an hundred times over. Or if they were not; it would be sufficient to reply in general,

neral, That still the Bible is demonstra- Discourse
ted to be the Word of God, which These II.
Objections do not in the least disprove; it
being already shewn at large under This
Head, That the Divine Authority of the
Scriptures being once established, the
Difficulties they contain are no Argu-
ment against them. Nay, there are very
good Reasons to be given why there should
be some Obscurities in Religion; and they
are so far from being an Argument *against*
it, that they are a Confirmation *of* it.
Which was the Third and Last Thing I
proposed to consider, under This Third
General Head.

And here we must premise This One
Observation; that we might be very well
satisfied about These Matters, even though
we could not any way account for them;
because God has most certainly a Reason
for all he does and says, whether we can
assign one, or no.

But besides, we can give very good
Reasons for the Difficulties of which I am
discoursing; Among which I shall menti-
on but These Four: *viz.* That These
Difficulties are of great Use:

1. To try our Faith.
2. To mortify our Vanity.
3. To engage our Reverence. And,
4. To engage our Attention.

(1. First

Discourse

II.

1. First then, it is the most reasonable Thing in the World, that God should put our Faith to some sort of Test; that we may prove whether we heartily and sincerely believe Him, and depend upon Him, or no. He did so with *Abraham*, and that in a much higher Instance than This we are now mentioning: It was a far more severe Tryal upon Him to Sacrifice his Son, than it is upon Us to Sacrifice our Folly and Presumption; much harder for Him to destroy his only beloved Child, than for Us to believe, upon God's Word, what we do not perfectly understand. This however is some degree of Proof, some sort of Resignation to the Wisdom and Authority of God; though it must indeed be confessed, that there is not here so much *Vertue* in yielding our Assent, as *Sin* in refusing it.

Psal. ix.
20.

2. The Difficulties we are considering, are of great Use to mortify our Vanity; to put us in mind that we are but Men, and that by the Frame of our finite and limited Capacities it is impossible we should understand all things. In This respect therefore God deals with us as He did with his People of old: The *Glory of the Lord* appears, but still it is in a Cloud; in some measure, I mean, though not so much Now as it was Then. He shews

shews us both the bright and the dark Discourse
 side of Things; the one to instruct, and II.
 the other to humble us. We know enough *2 Tim. iii.*
 to make us Wise unto Salvation, and so have
 no reason to complain; and are ignorant of
 enough to make us reflect upon our Weak-
 ness, and so have no reason to be proud.
 And sure it is most rational that it should
 be so; nay impossible it should be other-
 wise; unless we would suppose Men to
 be Gods; or as Gods, knowing Good and Gen. iii.
 Evil, meaning All of Both. Whereas, in
 truth, the only way to know Good and
 Evil, really, properly, and as we should
 do, in order to our Happiness, is not to
 pretend to be as Gods, or, in other Words,
 to be Omniscient.

3. These Obscurities in Religion and
 the Scriptures are of Use to engage our
 Reverence. This indeed, according to
 the Nature of the Thing, may seem super-
 fluous: For since These Oracles are Di-
 vine, That Consideration alone may ap-
 pear sufficient to excite our Veneration:
 But according to the Nature of our selves,
 which is Corrupt and Degenerate, all
 Means are few enough to make us Ver-
 tuous; and small ones have sometimes
 more Influence upon us than great ones.
 The darkest Part therefore of Religion
 may serve to engage our Reverence to the

Discourse Whole: As Temples were anciently built
 II. in Groves; and before there were any
 ~~~~~ Temples at all, Groves were the Places  
 of Divine Worship; that their Shade and  
 Gloominess might strike a Religious Awe,  
 or a kind of Sacred Horror, into the Wor-  
 shippers. And we all know that nothing  
 excites our Reverence to Sovereign Prin-  
 ces, more than This Consideration, that  
 though their Majesty in part be visible to  
 us, yet it is partly concealed; and though  
 some of their Counsels be discovered to  
 us, (as much as is needful for us to know,  
 with regard to our Duty and Obedience)  
 yet others are kept secret; and it would  
 be the utmost Folly and Presumption in  
 us to be Curious or Inquisitive concern-  
 ing them.

4. The last Use of These Difficulties  
 which I named, is to engage our *Study*  
 and *Attention*. For very many of them,  
 nay the greatest part, are (as I observed)  
 very capable of being explained, and  
 fully understood by Labour and Applicati-  
 on: And even Those which are not so are  
 the proper Objects of our Study; though  
 not to explain them, yet to consider what,  
 and how much, we are required to believe  
 concerning them. And can any thing be  
 more reasonable, than that the Oracles of  
 God, though sufficiently clear in the main,  
 should



No Argument against it.

67

should be so difficult and obscure, as to Discourse  
keep our Minds earnest and intent in II.  
Reading, to hinder them from slackening  
or unbending, to employ our Industry in  
*Searching the Scriptures*; the Discoveries  
which we make more than rewarding the  
Pains; we bestow in our Search after  
them?

To These Reasons, which are very plain, might be added Another, as (at least) highly probable; *viz.* That many Things in the inspired Writings are hidden from us here on Earth, that we may have the Pleasure and Happiness of discovering them in Heaven. This is extremely congruous in its own Nature, and agreeable to the constant Method and Tenour of God's Proceeding with the Children of Men: Which has always been to make gradual Manifestations of Himself; as he did first to the ancient Patriarchs, by his Revelations and Precepts before the Flood; then, to the People of the *Jews*, by the Law and the Prophets; and lastly, to all Mankind, by the more glorious Light of the Gospel.

That there should be These Difficulties therefore being, upon all These Accounts, so agreeable to Reason; They are so far from being an Argument against our Religion, that they are a Confirmation

Discourse II. tion of it: Which was what I undertook to prove.



IV. I proceed now, in the Fourth Place, to remark upon That Part of the Character of the Persons here mentioned by the Apostle; That They wrest These Difficulties *to their own Destruction*, and are *wicked*, as well as *foolish*, in so doing.

Joh. iii.  
19.

Our Blessed Saviour observes, that *Men love Darkness rather than Light, because their Deeds are Evil*. In pursuance of which Remark we may take notice, that they love Doubts rather than Certainty; because their Wills are perverse, and their Understandings confused. What can be more Foolish, than to chuse to be always tottering, when it is in our own Power to stand upon firm Ground? I say it is in our own Power; for (as I have fully shewn) the main Proofs and Points of Religion are sufficiently plain; and upon Them we may insist, if we think fit: Nor is there any Occasion of tormenting our selves with the inscrutable Things of God, whose Nature is incomprehensible, whose Judgments are unsearchable, and whose Ways are past finding out. What Folly to make our Heads giddy by shivering upon Precepices, and looking down into the Ocean; when we may, if we please, walk upon an even Surface with Safety and Delight?

light? We *may*, nay we *ought*, to en-<sup>Discourse</sup>  
*quire*; but let it be into Things which we <sup>II.</sup>  
 are capable of understanding; not into  
 Points, of which we are sure we can ne-  
 ver be satisfied. We may attempt to fa-  
 thom Depths; but let them not be such,  
 as we are certain exceed the Length of  
 our Line: We may endeavour to explain  
 Difficulties; but not Those which by the  
 Nature of the Things compared with our  
 Understandings, we may know to be in-  
 explicable. Nor is it at all difficult to know  
 which are so, and which are not. One  
 Rule we may take for Infallible; That  
 whenever *Infinite* is the Object of our Spe-  
 culations, we may depend upon it our Re-  
 searches are vain, and our Satisfaction im-  
 possible. Thus, for Example, it always  
 will be; when we enquire into the ab-  
 stracted Nature of God, the Trinity, In-  
 carnation, Eternal Foreknowledge, Prede-  
 stination, and Election. We ought to en-  
 quire diligently; but let it be for Some-  
 thing which conduces to our Happiness,  
 not for *Science falsely so called*: We ought  
 to dig deep; but not for Clay, or Peb-  
 bles, but for Gold, or Jewels; and that  
 too in a Place where there is a probable  
 Prospect of finding them. But to cut Rocks,  
 and dig through the Heart of Marble,  
 merely because it is difficult, and when



Discourse we are not like to be Gainers by our Labour, is monstrously Foolish and Unreasonable. To consider the Situation of such a bold Enquirer's Mind, is of itself sufficient to deter every thinking Person from being One of the Number. The Vexation and Uneasiness of it is inexpressible. Such a Man instead of walking in the smooth flowry Paths of Vertue, which are the plain Doctrines and Duties of Religion, is ever hampered and intangled in the Briers and Thorns of hard Questions, in the intricate Mazes and Labyrinths of Dispute. How foolish is it Thus to neglect the easy and obvious Means of Salvation, to amuse our selves with the difficult and inexplicable Points of Christianity; when we are on every side encompassed with such Dangers, as demand our utmost Care and Vigilance to avoid them! This is just as if a Man in a Tempest at Sea should, instead of using the necessary Means to save his Life, entertain himself and the Company by gravely Philosophising upon the Nature of Winds and Hurricanes; which, after all too, with his utmost Sagacity, he is not able to explain. And This leads us to consider further the exceeding Guilt, Folly, and Danger of This Speculation, with respect to our everlasting Interest in another World.

This

*No Argument against it.*

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II.

This will abundantly appear, if we do but reflect upon the Causes from whence it proceeds: Which are either Pride and Obstinacy; or Disaffection to Religion in general; or at best, a light, petulant, and capricious Temper. One, and indeed the chief Parent of Heresies and Heterodoxy, is Pride; That peculiar, and most distinguishing Quality of the Devil; That Quality, which was the original Cause of his Apostasy and Destruction. Vain-glory, and a mighty Opinion of their own Self-sufficiency, puts Men upon the Folly of being ambitious to be thought Discoverers and Inventors of some New Thing, Men above the common Level, of a more raised and penetrating Genius than ordinary. Thus the first Heretick, *Simon Magus*, gave out that himself was *some great one*: *Act. viii.* And his Successors in all Ages have generally proceeded upon the same Principle. Now the difficult and obscure Places of Scripture are always the Ground for These Impostors to act their part upon. Like Witches, and Demons, they love the Dark; and like Them too, if they continue obstinate, will meet with their Reward in outer Darkness. As for Those who wrest the *Things hard to be understood*, out of ill will to Religion in general; the Case is so very plain, and their Guilt so horrid, that

Discourse there is no occasion of insisting upon it.

II. But to suppose the best, even Those in whom it proceeds from a light, capricious, and petulant Temper, are in very great Danger; and even in Them it has a tendency to fatal Consequences. It unsettles the Understanding, leads to a Variety of Errors, false Doctrines, and damnable Heresies; and unfixes the common Principles even of Religion in general. This is so plain from what has been said; that we need not enlarge upon the Consideration of it. The Influence and Importance of Faith are sufficiently known: And how the Folly I am discoursing of tends to weaken our Faith, is no less evident. I proceed therefore in the

V. Fifth and Last Place to enforce the Exhortation of the Apostle; that we may not be led away by This Error of the Wicked, or *fall from our own Steadfastness*. It is Matter of common Observation, as well as agreeable to Reason, and the Nature of Things, that Those who have deceived Themselves, are always apt to deceive Others: And the Difficulties and Obscurities of Religion are the main Argument they insist upon. How weak, absurd, and irrational That Argument is, I have abundantly shewn in This Discourse. What remains, is to caution Those who are



are in danger of being deluded by it. And here it is to be observed, that some even well-disposed Persons are apt to pass rash Censures upon the obscure Places of Scripture, and to talk very foolishly, if not profanely, upon These Occasions: Which in Them proceeds purely from Thoughtlessness, and want of Consideration. Let Such be warned to reflect upon the dangerous Tendency of That Folly, as I have largely represented it: And let Those who are at the farthest distance from it, take the Advice of the Apostle in my Text; *Seeing they know these things before, let them beware lest they also, being led away by the Error of the Wicked, fall from their own Steadfastness.* Which last Expression is very emphatically, and very properly, opposed to the Word *Unstable*, in the former Part of the Text. The Tendency of Thus amusing our selves with *Things hard to be understood*, is (as we have observed) to unsettle our Minds, and to possess them with a Habit of Levity and Trifling: And of what Importance it is to act upon a Scheme of fixed and settled Principles; how pernicious and destructive, to be in a Maze of confused Ideas, without a determinate Train of Thinking; is too manifest, to need any Proof or Explanation. To strengthen therefore and confirm

Discourse

II.

firm what I have urged, I shall only farther observe Two Things, which are of the utmost Moment in themselves, as well as material to our present purpose.

1. It must be ever remembred, that the Difficulties we have been considering would not be at all complained of, were it not for Difficulties of another Kind; I mean Those which we meet with in the *practical* Part of Religion. People's Understandings would be well enough satisfied, were not their Wills perverse; and their Heads would be clear, if their Hearts were clean. The Precepts of Christianity are directly levelled against the Bent of our Corrupt Nature; and require us to renounce our most darling Sins; though the Operation be as painful as cutting off a Hand, or plucking out an Eye. And *Hinc illa Lacrima*: These are the Difficulties: The *Complaint* is only against the *Others*, the *Quarrel* is against *These*. 'Tis not from the Mysteries of Christianity, but from the Mystery of Iniquity, that all These Objections proceed. We should hear no Objections about *Original Sin*, were not eternal Damnation denounced upon our *Actual* Ones: The Enemies of Religion would make no Exceptions against the Doctrines of the Trinity, and Incarnation, were it not for the

the Doctrines of Self-Denial and Mortification: These latter make them Enemies to Religion; and then their Business is to raise all the Cavils which their Wit and Scepticism can muster against it. II.

2. It is carefully to be observed, that the Way to understand what we do *not* know in Religion, is to practise according to what we *do* know: By obeying the Precepts of the Gospel (which are all plain and intelligible) we shall have the fairest Probability of being by degrees let into its Secrets: And This we are assured of, from the natural Tendency of Things, and from the Promises of Holy Scripture. The Regularity of our Lives clears and enlarges the Intellectual Faculties: The farther we proceed in Goodness, the more Light will gradually break in upon us: *The Path of the Just* Prov. iv. (as the Wise Man teaches us) *is as the*<sup>24.</sup> *shining Light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect Day.* The Scriptures are to be studied with our Hearts, as well as Heads; with the Will and Affections, as well as with the Understanding. *The Natural Man* (as the Apostle assures us) *receiveth not the Things of the Spirit of God;*<sup>1 Cor. ii. 14.</sup> *for they are foolishness unto Him: neither can He know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* An Observation extremely



Discourse  
 II. frequently remarkable, and very seriously and frequently to be considered by us; though in fact it seems to be but little regarded. When we are habitual in the Practice of Vertue, we may with Confidence use the Prayer of the Inspired Writer; *Open*

*Psal. cxix. 18. thou mine Eyes, that I may see the Wonderful Things of thy Law; i. e. understand*

the more abstruse and difficult Points of Religion. But how can it be reasonably expected, that the Prophane should be admitted into the Holy of Holies; or that Those who are in the Pollutions of Sin should be acquainted with the vene-

*Psal. xxv. 14. of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his Covenant:* These are the Persons to be admitted into the more retired Oracles of God, into the Sacred Recesses of Divine Inspiration. I mean, all along, so far as Human Understanding is capable: For it must still be remembered, that, by reason of the Scantiness of our Capacities, some Things will be ever incomprehensible even to the Best of Men.

Upon the due Consideration therefore of what has been offered upon This important Subject, let us carefully avoid the Guilt and Folly mentioned in my Text; and not make so pernicious a Use of the Things

*Things hard to be understood.* Let us meditate upon what we know, and live according to That Knowledge, without bewildering our selves with Difficulties not necessary to be explained. For That which is certain and demonstrable in Christianity is enough to find full Employment for our Thoughts; and is, to the last degree, both profitable, and delightful. Let us frequently consider, for Example, that such a Noble and Excellent Being, as the Soul of Man by Experience finds herself to be, plainly Superiour to Every thing of This Sublunary World, and of a quite different Nature from it, could never be designed by the infinitely Wise Creator, only to spend a few Years in a Body, a Thing entirely beneath it, and then cease to be, and vanish into Nothing: That we manifestly perceive Two distinct Principles in Our selves, nay not only distinct *from*, but contrary *to* each other; I mean Flesh and Spirit; which, with a very little Deduction, evidently argues the Immortality of the Latter: That Thus far Natural Reason and Experience goe; but then that all This is seconded, improved, and ascertained, by Revelation; which does but close, and fall in, with Those common Notions of Truths to which the Soul naturally finds her self

Thus

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II.



Thus disposed. Then we are to consider, and often revolve in our Minds, the irrefragable Proofs and Arguments which demonstrate the Truth of the Christian Religion, and of the Holy Scriptures, as also the plain necessary Points both of Faith and Practice: And when we have done This, having Thus fixed and settled the Foundation, we may go on, if we please, and, if we are furnished with Talents sufficient for it, examine into the difficult and obscure Parts; only ever distinguishing between what we *are*, and what we are *not* capable of Knowing; and ever remembering that what is *necessary* to be known, is either sufficiently clear of itself, or at least easy to be explained; and that after all, some remaining Difficulties are of no Weight against a Truth fully proved, and freed from all Objections which are pretended to strike at the *Foundation* of it. For if we are resolved to believe Nothing against which some Difficulties may be urged, we must then indeed believe nothing; not only in Religion, but in any thing else. If we will indulge ourselves in This vain Humour; we may raise Objections (which indeed Some have the Folly to do) even against the plainest Duties not only of Revealed, but of Natural

Reli.



No Argument against it.

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Religion. For Instance, against Prayer, Discourse  
and the *Worship of God*: For what (say II.

These Scepticks) can our Prayers signify; when the infinite Perfections of the Divine Nature are such, that He cannot be wrought upon, so as to change his Determinations for any Actions of Ours; which would imply Weakness, and Imperfection in the Supreme Being? Here, we may observe, occurs the Idea of *Infinite*; which (as I said) will ever confound and amaze us: especially, if we do not consider that our own Understandings are Finite. But then Nothing can be more certain, than that Prayer to the Supreme Being is a dictate of Nature, an express Command of Revelation, and a Condition of our Happiness, both here, and hereafter: How it is with respect to the Infinite Being who has commanded it, is not our Business to enquire; though even of That a very rational Account may be given. The same Cavillers may, and sometimes do, ask why the Worship, Praise, and Adoration of God should be commanded; since He is infinitely Happy and Sufficient in Himself, and can receive no Addition to That Happiness by the Services of his Creatures? Here again is the Notion of *Infinite*; and because we do not comprehend Infinite,

Discourse Infinite, does it follow that God is not to be Honoured and Worshipped? When that He ought to be, is one of the first Dictates of Nature, and common Sense? And yet we see, there may be Objections raised even against That; as there may be indeed against Any thing, even the plainest and most important Principles of Morality. Were we therefore, I say, to indulge our selves in This ridiculous Humour of Cavilling; we might find, or make, Difficulties in the most uncontested Doctrines and Duties: But how Absurd, as well as Wicked, That would be, I leave it to any rational Person to consider.

I cannot, I presume, after the Cautions which I have given to the contrary, be misunderstood as endeavouring to dissuade Men from a due Enquiry into the Points both of Reason and Faith; So far otherwise, that I am persuading them to it. They should only regulate their Conduct in That Particular, and correct their Errors concerning it. For though our Understandings be imperfect; yet we must not run into the other Extreme, and imagine that they are useless or insignificant, as Some in their Rhetorical Declarations against Knowledge have seemed to represent them. Though we do not

know

No Argument against it.

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II.

know Every thing, we know a great deal; enough to make us Happy; Every thing (as the Apostle expresses it) that *pertaineth to Life and Godliness*: And for the rest, we may very well acquiesce in our Ignorance of it. Our Wisdom is to know the Length of our Line, and how far our Sight will reach; to pray God, that in the Instruction of our Minds, He would (as He did in the Creation of the World) divide the *Light from the Darkness*, and make us see the Difference between the Bright and Shady Side of Things: For next to knowing Every thing, the greatest Knowledge is to know what we are, and what we are not, capable of knowing. To determine which, may be one use of my Discourse upon This Subject.

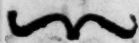
This is the only Way to clear our Difficulties, to be Wise, Good, and Happy. For amidst all the Obscurities of Christianity, Nothing can be plainer, than that we are taught, and commanded, to *deny all Ungodliness and Worldly Lusts, and* Tit. ii. *to live Soberly, Righteously, and Godly in* 11, 12. *this present World*: That Religion is perfective of our Nature, reducing things to their primitive and genuine Order; Reason to its Empire, and Passion to its Subjection; which makes us Easy in This

VOL. I. G World,



Discourse

II.



World, and Blessed in the World to come: But that a Wicked Life is an Inversion of the Order of Nature, putting the Subjects above their Sovereign; *i. e.* the Passions above Reason, the Flesh above the Spirit, the Animal and Sensitive Faculties above the Rational and Intellectual: That our Vices are our Tormenters and Plagues, our worst of Foes, the most unmerciful of Tyrants: That to entertain any Sin, though of never so fair and specious an Outside, is to harbour a Serpent in our Bosom, which, if it be not timely dislodged, will infallibly sting us to Death; and, that whenever it entices us with the Allurement of Pleasure, we ought to regard it as a Messenger from the Devil, sent, under the Appearance of Friendship and Love, to stab us to the Heart, to drink our Blood, to eat our Vitals, to rob us of our Peace, and Quier, our Lives, and our Souls; In a Word, as the Pest and Bane of our Happiness, as our most destructive and mortal Enemy: That therefore we can never keep our selves at too great a distance from it, nor too carefully avoid all Approaches and Tendencies towards it: And that though the Pain of resisting our vicious Inclinations, if they are customary and habitual, must be very great; yet That Pain, even in This Life, is

No Argument against it.

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is more than recompenced by the Pleasure of Virtue, and a good Conscience which follows upon it; Or, if it were not, it is however far better to be uneasy for a few Hours, Days, or Years, than to be inexpressibly miserable to infinite Ages. These are Points in which there is *no Difficulty*: These are Things *not hard to be understood*: Would to God they were as easy to be practised, as they are to be apprehended. And to our Comfort we may consider, that, as depraved as our Nature is, These Difficulties too, as well as Those of which I have been discouraging, These in Practice, as well as Those in Faith, are not near so difficult as they are pretended to be: 'Tis but resolutely to endure the Conflict for a Time, and we are certain to be more than Conquerors. By which means we shall at length arrive at That Blessed Place, where all *Difficulties* of all Kinds will be for ever removed: All Perverseness and Impurity from ours Wills; All Ignorance and Error from our Understandings.

Discourse  
II.

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 and Error from our Understandings.



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**The Causes of Scoffing at Religion : The Absurd Arguing concerning Reason and Faith, upon which it is founded : And the Folly and Misery of Those who are Guilty of it.**

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2 Pet. iii. 3, 4.

*Knowing this first, that there will come in the last days Scoffers, walking after their own Lusts ;*

*And saying, Where is the Promise of his Coming? —*

**B**Y This Expression [*In the last days*] Discourse both here, and in other Places of III. the New Testament, is not meant a certain or determinate Period ; but any Time of the Evangelical Dispensation indefinitely considered. The Apostle's Sense therefore is no more, than if he should have said ; Hereafter there will be a Sett of Prophane and Atheistical  
 G 3 Men,

Discourse

III.

Men, who, being led by their own brutal Lusts and Appetites, shall make it their Business to *Scoff at Religion*, to ridicule the Faith and Hope of Christians, insinuating, that they have no rational Grounds for their Belief; and asking them what Tendency they see towards the Performance of the Promises? Indeed, the Experience of our own Times, and the Histories of Those which are past, sufficiently assure us, that the Prophecy may relate to Any Age of the Gospel; because it has punctually been fulfilled in All. In the very Days of the Apostles, and their immediate Successors, the Church of Christ was infested with leud and profligate Hereticks, whose Practice was as dissolute, as their Doctrine was ridiculous; and, who pretending to be more *knowing* than the rest of the World, impudently drolled upon the truly Orthodox, exposed both their Principles and their Persons to Scorn, and endeavoured to raze the very Foundations of all Religion.

These (to the unspeakable Regret of All who have any Concern for God and Goodness) have had their Successors down to our Times; who not only continue, but (as it is to be feared) increase and multiply. A debauched and perverse Generation,

neration, who pretend to more Wit and Understanding than their Neighbours, for no reason but because they have less; whose Employment it is to unhinge Christianity, and laugh the Professors of it out of Countenance. *Faith*, with them, is a most despicable Folly, and calculated only for weak Judgments and strong Imaginations; whereas Nothing but downright Science, and infallible Demonstration will pass upon Men of Their Depth and Sagacity. Since therefore they find so much fault with our Faith, upon the Account (as they would have it believed) of being more exquisite Masters of Reason than Others; we shall consider their Pretensions, and answer their little Exceptions; In the Prosecution of which, I doubt not but we shall make it appear that they have as little Reason, as they have Religion; and are as bad Arguers, as they are Christians.

My Discourse upon the Words shall consist of Three Parts.

I. In the First of which I shall shew the Folly, Unreasonableness, and ridiculous Arguing of the Scoffers here mentioned, in Those Exceptions which they draw from the Nature of *Reason*, and *Faith*; upon which they ground their



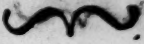
Discourse Contempt of Religion, spoken of in the  
III. Text.

II. In the Second, I shall consider the comfortless, and wretched Condition of such Men, even in This Life.

III. In the Third, I shall assign the principal Causes of such prophane and irreligious Practices.

These Three General Heads will, I believe, take in all that is necessary to be insisted upon from the Words which I have chosen. For the horrid Guilt, and destructive Consequence of such outrageous and insolent Impiety in the Next Life, are so manifest; that it were superfluous to enlarge upon the Proof of them in distinct Heads of Discourse. These Things may be touched upon by the way, as they happen to fall in with other Matters; but all that is requisite to be copiously considered upon This Subject, is to shew the irrational, absurd, and perverse Speculation, upon which the Practice I am speaking of is founded; and the wretched Folly and Madness of it; and then to point out the Causes which lead to it; that we may know them, and take care to avoid them.

I. First

I, *First* therefore, I am to shew the Discourse  
Folly, Unreasonableness, and ridiculous **III.**  
Arguing of the Scoffers here mentioned,   
in Those Exceptions which they draw  
from the Nature of *Reason* and *Faith*;  
upon which they ground their Contempt  
of Religion spoken of in the Text. I  
have chosen to insist upon Those Cavils  
which they draw from the Consideration  
of *Reason*, and *Faith*; partly because  
they pretend to be so exact in This Theo-  
ry, and value themselves so extremely  
upon it; and partly, because when This  
Matter is cleared, all their other Objecti-  
ons will of course fall to the Ground.  
Thus all their little Disputes about the  
Formation of the World, the History of  
the Fall of Man, Original Sin, the Myste-  
ries of Christianity, the seeming Incon-  
gruity of some Gospel-Precepts, and the  
like, would immediately vanish and come  
to nothing; would they be pleased to  
consider the Extent of their *Reason*, and  
allow to *Faith*, the same fair Dealing, as  
they do to other Assents. In the Ma-  
nagement of This Point, I shall proceed  
by the following Measures.

1. I shall endeavour to shew the true  
Difference between *Reason*, and *Faith*;  
their separate Notions, and distinct Pro-  
vinces.

2. The

Discourse

III.

2. The Use of Reason about Matters of Religion.

3. The Reasonableness of Faith from the Grounds upon which it is built. And,

4. The Folly of That popular Objection, drawn from Those Points of Faith which transcend our Reason.

1. First then, I am to shew the Difference between *Reason* and *Faith*; their distinct Natures, and separate Provinces.

There is scarce any Word used in more Senses, than This of *Reason*; the not clearly distinguishing of which has been the Cause of great Confusion, and much insignificant Discourse. I shall at present take notice only of Two Significations which it bears; These being the most material, and the most proper to be here considered. Sometimes then it is taken for the whole Understanding considered altogether; including all the Modes of Thinking, whether simple, or complex: The Power of single and unreflecting Apprehension; of Judgment, and Affirming or Denying any thing; Of Arguing, or Inferring one thing from another: All This, I say, is very often signified by That one comprehensive Term. In This Sense, it is plain that *Reason* stands to signify



signify a very diffusive Notion, and in- Discourse  
cludes all Assents whatsoever: These all III.  
relating to the Judgment; and an As-  
sent being Nothing else but a Judgment  
of a Thing's being true, and an embrac-  
ing of it as such. From whence it fol-  
lows, that Faith, among other Assents, is  
comprehended under it; and as *Reason*  
is Thus explained, *Faith* is one Branch of  
it; and differs from it only as a particu-  
lar Notion from a more general one, or  
a Part from the Whole.

But in the Controversies about *Reason*  
and *Faith*; by *Reason* is to be understood  
the Judgment, or the Faculty of Judg-  
ing, concerning the Truth or Falshood  
of a Thing, by *Arguments arising from the*  
*internal Nature of it*; from the Consider-  
ation of *Causes and Effects*, and other  
*Circumstances immediately relating to the*  
*Thing itself*, without any external Evi-  
dence, or the Consideration of a *Person*  
*asserting it*, or any Qualifications belong-  
ing to him. In short, when by the Co-  
herence of one Proposition with an-  
other we prove a Thing by probable, or  
demonstrative, Mediums, so as to pro-  
duce either Opinion, or Science; then it  
is that we are said to prove a Thing  
by Reason. Whereas Faith is a Judg-  
ment concerning This or That Truth,  
without

Discourse

III.

without any such sort of Proof; it considers only the Person testifying, and upon His Authority alone embraces the Point proposed. 'Tis true indeed, in Matters of Human Faith, the Probability of them comes under Consideration; we reflect both upon the Nature of the Thing, and the Qualification of the Person: And Both These concur to the determining of our Assent; which is of a *mixed* Nature, partly *Faith*, and partly *Opinion*: And sometimes the One, and sometimes the Other, is more prevalent. Because we cannot be *absolutely* and *infalibly* sure of the Truth of any Human Testimony; we may *always possibly*, and *very often probably*, be deceived by it: And therefore *other Considerations* will help forward, and be of weight to convince us *in conjunction* with Those which relate to the Person testifying. And even in Matters of Divine Faith, most of the Points proposed to our Belief are probable in Nature; and some of them demonstrable. But then we have no need of Those Proofs to determine our Assent, after we are once satisfied that God has given his Testimony; It being impossible that He should attest a Falshood: And therefore we entirely acquiesce in That external Consideration, without concerning our  
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ing  
guil  
Nor  
ny l  
ove

felves with any Proofs drawn from the *Discourse*  
Nature of the Things we believe. And *III.*  
since the *Probability* of some Points need not  
be considered to incline our Assent in Di-  
vine Faith; it follows that the *incompre-*  
*hensible* Nature of others will not hinder or  
*suspend* it, if the Grounds of Belief be du-  
ly examined. In one Case, God has said  
it, and upon That account we believe,  
*without considering* that the Thing is *pro-*  
*bable* in itself; in the other Case, God has  
said it, and upon That account we believe,  
*though* we consider that the Thing in itself  
is *incomprehensible*. However, though (as  
we have observed) Reason and Faith  
sometimes meet; and the Assent is mixed,  
as depending partly upon probable, and  
partly upon credible, Motives; yet even  
Then, if they are accurately considered,  
the Natures of them are very distinct. By  
the One we assent to any supposed Truth  
upon the Arguments drawn from the in-  
ternal Constitution of Things, or some  
Circumstances immediately relating to  
them; By the Other we assent upon the  
sole Consideration of the Person testify-  
ing. Thus are Reason and Faith distin-  
guished; both Excellent in their Kinds:  
Nor need we set them at Variance, as ma-  
ny have done; nor disparage the One, by  
over-praising and too much extolling the  
Other.



Discourse Other. Some are such extravagant Asserters of the Rights, Privileges, and Liberties of Reason; that they will allow nothing to be true, but what can be clearly proved, and thoroughly comprehended by it: They look upon This to be an infallible Guide, an unerring Oracle, in Opposition to Faith, which they take to proceed from nothing but Delusion, and Weakness of Judgment. Others, on the contrary, are for all Faith, and no Reason; they think *That* to be the only Discoverer of Truth, the only Enlightner of the Mind; whereas *This* with Them is a carnal and heathenish Principle, and 'tis no less than a Sin for a Christian to hearken to it, or be guided by its Dictates. These are Extremes; and as opposite to Truth, as they are to one another. Reason and Faith are distinct, but not contrary; and Those who thus set them at Variance, talk at rovers about them, and know not what they mean by either of them. Reason, no doubt of it, is the Gift of God, as well as Faith; and a most distinguishing Excellence in us, whether it be considered in its most comprehensive, or in a more restrained and limited, Sense: And nothing can be more irrational than to deny us the Use of it. The only Danger is, lest we should abuse it

it by our Pride and Folly, suffer it to go beyond its Line, and wander out of its due Bounds. On the other hand, Faith is as rational an Assent as any belonging to the Understanding; and furnishes our Minds with the best, noblest, and most useful, sort of Knowledge. In short, These two are so far from jarring and interfering; that they do best in Conjunction, and are mutually assisted and improved by each other. The Proof of This belongs to my second Particular; in which I am

Discourse  
III.

2. To shew the true Use of Reason about Religion. For we are so far from rejecting it in Divine Matters; that we gladly and thankfully make Use of its Light, and confess that we could not be satisfied without it. And its Assistance is convenient, nay absolutely necessary, in These following Instances.

1. In fixing the Principles of *Natural Religion*, founded upon the *Being of God*; which is the Source of all Moral Obligations.

2. Even with respect to *Revealed Religion*, Reason is necessary to consider the several Degrees of Credibility; to judge of the Evidence and Grounds of Belief; to distinguish what are Points of Divine Faith, and what are not. None but an  
Idiot

Discourse  
 III. Idiot will believe he knows not why;  
 or yield his Assent, without examining  
 the Proofs which are urged to determine  
 it. This is not Faith, but Credulity;  
 and we are so far from being required to  
 act in This manner; that we are com-  
 manded to the direct contrary. By Rea-  
 son it is that we discover the Truth of  
 These Propositions; That God is true;  
 That He can neither be deceived Him-  
 self, nor deceive Us. By Reason we are  
 assured that he, who pretending to speak  
 in the Name of God, acts by his super-  
 natural Power, does really speak in his  
 Name; because it is impossible that  
 God should set his Seal to a Falshood.  
 By This we distinguish true Pretensi-  
 ons from false ones, a real Commission  
 from Fraud and Imposture. By This  
 we conclude it morally impossible that  
 many Thousands of Men, of different  
 Nations, and different Interests, Foes,  
 as well as Friends, should conspire to-  
 gether to relate a false Matter of Fact,  
 and impose it upon the World, without  
 any Prospect of Advantage. These, and  
 such like, Truths properly come under  
 the Cognizance of Reason; and are not  
 themselves Matters of Faith, but pre-  
 vious and preparatory to them. I say,  
 they are cognizable by Reason; because  
 the



the Proof of them depends not upon Te-<sup>Discourse</sup>stimony, but upon the Nature of the <sup>III.</sup> Things themselves. To assert that they are Matters of Faith, is most absurd.

For what can be more so than to say, that it is Matter of Divine Faith that such a Thing is Matter of Divine Faith; without stopping, or giving any other Evidence? They may Thus set one imaginary Faith behind another, and so on *in infinitum*; and never have any Foundation at all. Which, by the Bye, may serve to shew the Folly of some wild Enthusiasts, and other grave Talkers among us; who decry the Use of Human Reason in These Matters; when our most Holy Faith is manifestly built upon it. Their Faith indeed seems to be produced without its Assistance; and they quarrel with Reason upon no other Account, but because they have so little of it Themselves.

3. Another very considerable Use of Reason about Matters of Faith, is to *Explain difficult Places of Scripture*, to understand the true Mind of God, and to search out the Meaning of Those Texts in which the Sense is retired and obscure. To say that This is the Business of Faith, is no less an Absurdity than That which

Discourse

III.



I just now took notice of. For suppose a Man to be considering any Point of Scripture; That what he is considering is true, he is satisfied by Faith, being convinced that it is the Word of God; but he is at a loss to know the Meaning of it. Here then he is to believe—What? That This, or That is the true Sense of it? Upon whose Testimony must he believe This? Not upon God's: For he is supposed not to have determined the Matter; if he had, there would be no doubt concerning it. Wherefore, unless we could obtain a new Revelation to expound the Meaning of an old one; to acquiesce in any particular Interpretation of Scripture, can by no means be the Business of Faith.

In These Instances which we have mentioned, the Use of Reason is not only lawful, but necessary: But when we are once convinced that God has said a thing, and are satisfied that we understand its Meaning; Here the Office of Reason expires, and Faith immediately takes place. We are not to judge about the Probability of it, or urge any Arguments from the Nature of the Thing; at least not in Opposition to Faith, so as to deny, or even suspend, our Assent to the Point

Point proposed. For I do not say, that Discourse  
III.  
when a Matter of Faith is in its Nature probable, or demonstrable, it is unlawful to prove it by Reason; but it is unnecessary, and proceeds from a needless Curiosity. And it is certainly a very great Sin to prove it This Way, so as to neglect Faith, and yield the Other Assent rather than This. Nay even for our own Satisfaction of its Truth; that God has affirmed it to be so, is generally a far better Proof, than any other we are able to produce. However, our Reason may subscribe to it with Submission; but not magisterially slight it, much less rebelliously oppose it. For, on the other hand, when the Points to be believed are so far from being proveable by Reason, that they are not in the least discoverable by it, but infinitely transcend and surmount it; In This Case, Reason has nothing at all to do; its Judgment is entirely superseded; and its Province is to acquiesce, and be silent. And if the Adversaries of This Doctrine had but half so much Reason as they imagine they have; they would be far from thinking This a hard Saying. For it amounts to no more than This; that, the Points being sufficiently made out one way, we are

H 2                      required



Discourse required to give our Assent to them,  
 III. though they cannot be made out any other way. If This be so hard and intolerable a Burthen upon them, we know not what will please them; but must leave them, like froward Children, to be continually complaining, and never satisfied. Which puts me in mind of my Third Particular, in which I am to shew,

3. The *Reasonableness* of *Faith*, from the Grounds upon which it is built. To do This will be no very difficult Task; and therefore I need not be long upon the Proof of it. For though we should grant, that all Assents are irrational which do not depend upon absolute Certainty (which never will be granted, because the Reasonableness of any Assent depends upon its being proportioned to That Degree of Evidence which it has, be it more or less, and not upon Certainty only) yet even Then it would appear, that Faith is congruous to the best Sense we have, and worthy of the wisest Man's Understanding. *Certainty* indeed is by most Men, I know not why, appropriated to *Demonstration*; and they will have it, that we are *sure* of nothing, but what we *know*: But if they would explain themselves, and consider  
 more

more closely, they would find that This <sup>Discourse</sup> is a Mistake; and that there is Cer- <sup>III.</sup>  
*tainty in Faith*, as well as in *Science*. For

if we are properly said to have *Certainty*, when the Assent is fully given, without the least Hesitancy, or Fluctuation; and when the Mind perfectly acquiesces in the Truth of a Thing, without any manner of Doubt or Scruple; then it is evident that we are absolutely sure of many Things, which we only believe, and cannot demonstrate. And This holds true not only in Divine, but very often even in Human, Faith. Can a Man be more sure of any thing in Science, than he is of several Facts, only upon Report? Or should several Friends, whom we have by long Experience found to be of unquestionable Veracity, solemnly assure us by repeated Assertions, that they saw or heard such a Thing themselves; should we not, without the least Doubt, assent to it, though the thing seemed very strange, nay highly improbable? Numberless Instances of This Nature might be produced: But the Matter is so plain, that there is no occasion for them. Very often therefore we have *Certainty* even in Human Faith; and very often indeed we have not. But even Then the Assent

Discourse is never the less rational; if it be proportioned to the Degree of Evidence we have before us. As for Divine Faith, that it is impossible what God says should be false, we can demonstrate: That he has said Those Things which are proposed to our Belief, we have sufficient Evidence to convince us; and we are often actually convinced by much less, in other Matters.

4. And so I pass on to my Fourth Particular; *viz.* To shew the Folly of That popular Objection, drawn from Those Points of Faith which transcend our Reason.

That *there are* such Points, is very true: And we are so far from denying This, that we frequently remind People of it; telling them, that because Those Points are above our Comprehension, they ought not to be curiously enquired into, or scanned by our narrow Understandings. But that This is a reasonable Objection against them, we cannot by any means allow. And yet it is vehemently urged, and insisted on, not only by Those with whom I have hitherto been contending, who refuse all other Matters of Faith, as well as These, and deny the Foundations of Christianity; but



but by Some who call themselves Chri- Discourse  
stians, and pretend to own the Divine III.  
Authority of the Holy Scriptures. They ~~~~~  
will not allow of Mysteries in Religion;  
and cannot believe any thing to be true,  
the Nature of which is above Their  
Comprehension. No? Not any thing?  
Do they lay down This for a general  
Rule, and will they be sure to stand to  
This Principle? Let us examine it a little  
in other Instances; and consider whither  
it will carry them. In the first place  
then, Do These Men fully and thorough-  
ly understand all the Nature and Proper-  
ties of Matter, or Body? Can they de-  
monstrate how the Parts of it are joined  
and compacted together; and what is  
That invisible Cement which hinders them  
from falling asunder? Have they a clear  
and adequate Notion of Space; and can  
they solve all the Difficulties about Mo-  
tion, and Vacuity? Not one of These  
Things are they able to account for; and  
the most subtile Enquirers into Nature  
are forced to confess themselves at a Loss  
in These Speculations. So that upon  
This Principle, that we must believe no-  
thing but what we comprehend, they  
must deny that there is any such Thing  
as their so much magnified Matter and  
H 4 Motion;

Discourse

Motion; must deny that there are any

III. Bodies, as well as Spirits, in the World; and insist upon it, that what we feel, see, and hear, is not really in Being. Again, Who can explain the manner of Thinking, or tell us how That is performed which we call Willing and Understanding? Nay, let us see the Man that can so much as explain by what Springs he moves his Finger; or how upon such particular Determinations of the Mind, such particular Motions of the Body should follow. In a word, Instances of This Nature are innumerable; and we are so far from comprehending Every thing, that we are wretchedly ignorant in Most things. The most inconsiderable Plant, or Vegetable, the poorest Insect, or the smallest Grain of Sand, has enough in it to puzzle and confound us. Nay, there is nothing that we see, or perceive by any other of our Senses, but is able to baffle all our Philosophy, and convince us of the Scantiness of our Understandings. A Consideration, which one would think should not only mortify our Pride; but be in danger of driving us into the other Extreme, of damping our Endeavours in the Search after Speculative Truth, and tempting us to neglect the

the Improvement of That Knowledge. Discourse  
Upon This Principle therefore, the Folly III.

of which I am now considering, we are to deny the Being of whatever we see: Nay, we are to deny our own Being; for we are far from comprehending the Manner even of That. We see then the Absurdity of Those who pretend we cannot rationally believe any thing which is above our Comprehension; since This Rule is contradictory to the Sense of all Mankind, even of These Men themselves. So that it is no Objection against the Belief of Mysteries in Christianity, to say they transcend our Reason: But then we have the best Reason in the World for our Faith in These Particulars; viz. the unerring Testimony of God. And all These pretended Difficulties will presently vanish; if we will be pleased to take His Word, and suppose His Understanding to be better than our Own. Here therefore our Theories and Argumentations ought to cease; and if (as it has been compared) Reason be always encroaching, and endeavouring to win upon Faith, like Sea upon Land; we must check its Exorbitancy, as God does That of the Ocean; and say, *Hitherto Job  
shalt thou go, but no further; and here xxxviii.  
shall thy proud Waves be stayed.* II.

And



Discourse

III.



And Thus having shewn, 1. The true Difference between Reason and Faith, their separate Notions, and distinct Provinces: 2. The true Use of Reason about Matters of Religion: 3. The Reasonableness of Faith from the Grounds upon which it is built: And 4. The Folly of That popular Objection drawn from Those Points of Faith, which transcend our Reason: I have dispatched the First Part of my Discourse, in which I proposed to shew the Folly, Unreasonableness, and ridiculous Arguing of the Scoffers here mentioned, in Those Exceptions which they draw from the Nature of Reason and Faith: Upon which they ground their Contempt of Religion spoken of in the Text. I am now to consider, in the Second Place,

II. The comfortless, and wretched Condition of such Men even in This Life.

Take away the Supports, the Comforts, the Illuminations, and Instructions, of Religion; and Man is the most miserable Part of the Creation. His Reason is of no use, but to disquiet him, by upbraiding him with his Ignorance and Guilt. We are naturally, and, at best, extremely Ignorant; but to increase That Ignorance

Ignorance by Art and Study, to labour Discourse  
 to extinguish the Principle which alone III.  
 can rightly inform us; and yet not to be  
 able so far to do it, but that it will  
 just have Strength and Power enough  
 to Torment us; is certainly the most dis-  
 consolate of all Conditions. Then, the  
 profligate Course of their Lives is such,  
 that, for want of Religion's having its  
 due Influence upon them, they are of  
 all Men the most Miserable. They would  
 fain persuade themselves that the Princi-  
 ples of Religion are false, or at least un-  
 certain, and precarious. But they are  
 not able to perform Either, with any Ad-  
 vantage to Themselves: For still These  
 stinging Reflections will evermore be oc-  
 curring to their Thoughts; Suppose, af-  
 ter all, These Things should be true; (as  
 most probably, and indeed, if we truly  
 consider Things, most certainly they are;) ~  
 why then I am the most improvident  
 Fool, as well as the most ridiculous Ar-  
 guer, this day existing in the Universe.  
 Thus while he laughs, and pretends to  
 great Gaiety of Heart, in ridiculing Re-  
 ligion; the Words of the Wise-Man are  
 most remarkably verify'd of him, *even in*  
*Laughter the Heart is sorrowful.* An \* Emi-

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\* Monsieur Paschal.

Discourse

III.

gent Author of a neighbouring Nation, who was truly stiled a Prodigy of Parts, discourses so excellently upon This Subject; that I cannot forbear repeating some of his Words.

“ He who doubts,” says he, speaking of the great Concern of Religion, “ and yet seeks not to be resolved, is equally Unhappy, and Unjust. But if, withal, he appears easy and composed; if he freely declares his Indifference; nay, if he takes a Vanity in professing it, and seems to make This most deplorable Condition the Subject of his Pleasure and Joy: I have not Words to fix a Name on so extravagant a Creature. Where’s the very possibility of entering into These Thoughts and Resolutions? What Delight is there in expecting Misery without End? What Vanity in finding one’s self encompassed with impenetrable Darkness? Or what Consolation in despairing for ever of a Comforter?”

“ To sit down with some sort of Acquiescence under so fatal an Ignorance, is a thing unaccountable beyond all Expression: And They who live with such a Disposition, ought to be made sensible of its Absurdity and Stupidity, by having their inward Reflections laid open

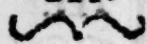


“ open to them ; that they may grow Discourse  
“ wise by the Prospect of their own III.  
“ Folly. For behold how Men are wont  
“ to reason ; while they obstinately re-  
“ main thus ignorant of what they are,  
“ and refuse all Methods of Instruction  
“ and Illumination.

“ Who has sent me into the World  
“ I know not ; what the World is I  
“ know not, nor what I am my self. I  
“ am under an astonishing and terrifying  
“ Ignorance of all things. I know not  
“ what my Body is, what my Senses, or  
“ my Soul : This very Part of me which  
“ thinks what I speak, which reflects  
“ upon every thing else, and even upon  
“ itself, yet is as mere a Stranger to its  
“ own Nature, as the dullest Thing I  
“ carry about me. I behold These fright-  
“ ful Spaces of the Universe with which  
“ I am encompassed ; and I find my self  
“ chained to one little Corner of the Vast  
“ Extent, without understanding why I  
“ am placed in This Seat, rather than in  
“ any other ; or why This Moment of  
“ Time, given me to live, was assigned  
“ rather at such a Point, than at any o-  
“ ther of the whole Eternity which was  
“ before me, or of all That which is to  
“ come after me. I see nothing but  
“ Infi-

Discourse

III.



“ Infinities on all sides; which devour  
 “ and swallow me up, like an Atom;  
 “ or like a Shadow, which endures but  
 “ a single Instant, and is never to re-  
 “ turn. The Sum of my Knowledge is,  
 “ that I must shortly die; but That  
 “ which I am most Ignorant of, is This  
 “ very Death, which I feel my self un-  
 “ able to decline.

“ As I know not whence I came, so  
 “ I know not whither I go; only This  
 “ I know, that at my Departure out of  
 “ the World, I must either fall for ever  
 “ into Nothing, or into the Hands of an  
 “ Incensed G O D; without being capa-  
 “ ble of deciding, which of These two  
 “ Conditions shall Eternally be my Por-  
 “ tion. Such is my State; full of Weak-  
 “ ness, Obscurity, and Wretchedness.  
 “ And from all This I conclude, that I  
 “ ought, therefore, to pass all the Days  
 “ of my Life, without considering what  
 “ is hereafter to befall me; and that I  
 “ have nothing to do, but to follow my  
 “ Inclinations, without Reflection or Dis-  
 “ quiet, in doing all that which, if what  
 “ Men say of a miserable Eternity prove  
 “ True, will Infallibly plunge me into  
 “ it. 'Tis possible I might find some  
 “ Light to clear up my Doubts, but I  
 “ shall

*Scoffing at Religion, &c.*

III

Discourse  
III.

" shall not take a Minute's Pains, nor  
" stir one Foot in the Search of it. On  
" the contrary, I am resolved to treat  
" Those with Scorn and Derision who  
" labour in This Enquiry and Care; and,  
" so to run without Fear or Foresight,  
" upon the Tryal of the grand Event;  
" permitting my self to be led softly  
" on to Death, utterly Uncertain as to  
" the eternal Issue of my future Condi-  
" tion.

" In earnest, 'tis a Glory to Religion,  
" to have so unreasonable Men for its  
" profess'd Enemies: And their Opposi-  
" tion is of so little Danger, that it  
" serves to illustrate the principal Truths  
" which our Religion teaches. For the  
" main Scope of *Christian* Faith is to  
" establish These two Principles, the Cor-  
" ruption of Nature, and the Redem-  
" ption by *Jesus Christ*: And These Op-  
" posers, if they are of no use towards  
" demonstrating the Truth of the Re-  
" demption, by the Sanctity of their  
" Lives, yet are, at least, admirably use-  
" ful in shewing the Corruption of Na-  
" ture, by so unnatural Sentiments and  
" Suggestions.

" Nothing is so important to any  
" Man, as his own State and Condi-  
" tion: Nothing so amazing as Eterni-  
" ty.



Discourse

III. “ ty. If therefore we find Persons In-  
 “ different to the Loss of their Being,  
 “ and to the Danger of endless Misery;  
 “ ’tis impossible that This Temper should  
 “ be Natural. They are quite other  
 “ Men in all other Regards; they fear  
 “ the smallest Inconveniences; they see  
 “ them, as they approach, and feel them,  
 “ if they arrive: And he who passes  
 “ Days and Nights in Chagrine or De-  
 “ spair, for the Loss of an Employment,  
 “ or for some imaginary Blemish in his  
 “ Honour, is the very same Mortal who  
 “ knows that he must lose all by Death,  
 “ and yet remains without Disquiet, Re-  
 “ sentment, or Emotion, This wonder-  
 “ ful Insensibility with respect to Things  
 “ of a most fatal Consequence, in a Heart  
 “ so nicely sensible of the meanest Trifles,  
 “ is an astonishing Prodigy, an unintelli-  
 “ gible Enchantment, a supernatural  
 “ Blindness and Infatuation.

III. I am now, in the Third Place,  
 to assign the principal Causes of such pro-  
 phane and irreligious Practices. Among  
 These, I shall not reckon perfect Infide-  
 lity, or a Persuasion that our Religion  
 is absolutely false; because I believe there  
 are now, but Few, if Any, among us, to  
 whom That Character belongs. But at  
 This

this day, the Causes of Scoffing at Religion, seem chiefly to be These Three: Discourse  
III.

1. A Sceptical and Captious Temper;
2. A Foolish Affectation of Wit; And,
3. A Vicious and Debauched Life.

What are the Causes of These themselves, and what Connexion in all respects they have one with another, it is not my Business to enquire. It suffices for my present Purpose to consider them, only as This execrable Habit is the Effect of some one, or all of them.

1. *First* then, One of the Principal Causes of This Impious Mirth is a *Sceptical* and *Captious* Temper. Men who are blessed with so Philosophical a Genius, as to doubt of Every thing, and have by much Art and Study improved their Understandings to such a prodigious degree, as not to understand the most intelligible Things in Nature, have always been observed to lay out their Objections chiefly upon Religion. Perhaps, because That being held Sacred by the rest of the World; it shews a more daring Spirit, and more exalted Flights of Impudence, and makes a Man more taken notice of, to raise Cavils against That, than against Truths of less Moment and Concern. It shews that no Superstitious Fears, nor the Prejudices of Custom

Discourse

and Education, shall ever fetter Their Reason, debar them from their undoubted Right of Free-Thinking, or hinder them from sounding the Depths of every Point proposed to them. Nor do we desire to debar them from That Privilege: But no Man living can find where the Depth of Reason lies in denying Every thing, and proving Nothing; in questioning the Truth of first Principles, and bidding Defiance to the common Sense of all Mankind. However it be, having long indulged themselves in This vain ludicrous Humour, they are very naturally, though insensibly, led to That impious and prophane One mentioned in the Text. The easiest Transition in the World, is from Cavilling at Religion to Ridiculing it. For they have already worn off all Reverence to it; by having no settled Notions or Principles, and being confirmed in a Habit of Levity and Trifling. And then it cannot be imagined, what should hinder them from the most irreligious Scoffs and Invectives; especially if the Temptation of a *Jest* should happen to lie in the Way. Which leads me to the Second Cause I assigned; which was,



2. A foolish *Affectation of Wit*. It is <sup>Discourse</sup> indeed very strange, that the Gratifica- <sup>III.</sup> tion of so small an Appetite as This should put any Rational Creature upon such horrid and desperate Impieties. But so it is, that Men of loose Principles, and shallow Intellectuals, being ambitious to appear Bright and Diverting in Conversation, are forced to make use of This wretched Shift, talking Atheistically, and rallying the Bible: Which, for its Oddness and Impudence, makes them admired indeed; but then they are admired not for any Excellency, but for something Monstrous and Unnatural. Many, 'tis true, wonder at them; but None, but Themselves, were ever Fools enough to applaud them. For how does the Sprightliness of their Parts appear, in treating the most serious Things in the World with Sport and Laughter? If This be Wit, to confound all Distinction of Notions, and make a Trifle of That which, in the general Judgment of Mankind, commands Awe and Veneration; Wit is certainly the most motly Piece of Folly that ever was invented; since it is made up of such shocking Inconsistencies. But the Truth of the Matter is, This is no Wit at all, but very far from it; according to the Judg-

Discourse

III.



ment of Those who best understand it. Hither may not improperly be reduced Another, though a less, degree of Prophaneness, which Many are guilty of; who, though they are not come to That height of Impiety, as to deride all Religion, are yet in a fair way which leads directly to it. I mean Those, who out of This vain Affectation of Wit, make use of *Scripture-Phrases* to furnish out their *insignificant Jests* in common Discourse: Who love to rally in the Stile of Inspiration, and vilify the Divine Writings by their impious Allusions. This is an insolent Affront to the awful Majesty of Heaven, and can never be endured by Those who have a due Respect for Christ and his Gospel. Or if it can be suffered by Them; yet it will not be pardoned, without a severe Repentance, by That jealous God, who will no more have His *Word* to be *taken in vain*, than His *Name*. For what can be more provoking, or a greater Instance of Irreverence to Him, than thus to toss about His Words and Expressions in their Merry-Meetings, and make Them the Subjects of their senseless Buffoonery? Let These Men be assured, that such Mirth is dangerous; and he who would rather be prophane, than disappointed of his Jest, may have his *Laughter* turned

turned into Mourning, and his Jocular Con-  
 versation into Weeping and Gnashing of  
 Teeth. But, Discourse  
III.

3. The chief and most eminent Cause  
 of Scoffing at Religion, is a *wicked and  
 debauched Life*. They are Those who *walk  
 after their own Lusts*, (as the Text assures  
 us) who indulge themselves in These Out-  
 rages. 'Tis true, This Habit itself is the  
 Cause of greater and more heightned  
 Degrees of Wickedness, improves their  
 Debaucheries, and confirms them in their  
 Vicious Courses: But then their corrupt  
 Practice was first and originally the Cause  
 of it. In short, the whole Process is ge-  
 nerally This: Having fallen from one  
 Wickedness to another, and arrived at a  
 very high Pitch of Vice and Impiety, the  
 Habits of Sin being very strong upon  
 them; they cannot think with any Pati-  
 ence upon the laborious Task of Repen-  
 tance, they are gone so far, that they  
 do not care to go back; and so, for their  
 present Ease and Satisfaction, they endea-  
 vour to expunge Religion out of their  
 Minds, furnish themselves with Argu-  
 ments against it, and turn all its Princi-  
 ples into Mirth and Drollery. Then This  
 heightens their licentious and ungodly  
 way of Living, and makes them *twofold*  
*more the Children of Hell* than they were  
 before.



Discourse before. But originally, and first of all,  
 III. they were flamingly Vicious, before they  
 were Scoffers; and the former was the  
 occasion of the latter. They therefore  
 deny the Scriptures, because they de-  
 nounce Vengeance and eternal Damna-  
 tion upon Them; They disown a God, be-  
 cause they know he is a consuming Fire  
 against such Profligates as they are; They  
 laugh at Heaven, because, in the Way  
 they are now in, they are sure they shall  
 never come Thither; and deny Hell, be-  
 cause they are like to be condemned to  
 That Place of Torment. In short, they  
 heartily wish all these Things were false;  
 and therefore endeavour to persuade them-  
 selves that they are so. May God give  
 such Wretches (if they are not quite a-  
 bandoned) a Sight of their most horrid  
 Guilt; and keep Others from the dread-  
 ful Curse of falling into it: Lest they  
 should be finally excluded from That Hea-  
 ven, which they have denied; and be for-  
 ever tormented in Those unquenchable  
 Flames, which they have made it their  
 Business to ridicule,

## The Nature, Justice, and Fatal Consequences, of a JUDICIAL INFATUATION.

2 THESS. ii. 11, 12.

—For This cause God shall send them strong Delusion, that they should believe a Lye;

That they all might be Damned that believed not the Truth, but had pleasure in Unrighteousness.

**E**RROR and Delusion (considered as such) are Things, for which the Discourse  
 Mind of Man has a natural Aversion. IV. ~~~~~  
 Truth is the Object of the Will, as well as of the Understanding; it being a Good to the One, because it produces an Acquiescence in the other. Thus indeed it ought to be, according to the Eternal Truth and Reasons of Things: Because, God being the Fountain and Standard of Truth, the more we perceive and embrace That, the nearer we approach

Discourse to the Perfection of the Divine Nature.

IV. It is likewise highly desirable, because to be well or ill informed, has an immediate Influence upon our Happiness or Misery: A wrong Judgment, in Matters of Moment and Concern, will probably draw a Chain of ill Consequences after it; by committing an *Error*, we are in great danger of committing a *Sin*; and to be Deceived in our Thoughts, is the ready way to be Vicious in our Actions.

And as we ought to have such an Appetite for *Truth*; so (as I said) we *actually* have it, even in This present State of Degeneracy and Corruption. Human Nature is not so far depraved, but that we still desire *Good in general*, and *Truth* in particular. The only Misfortune is, That we embrace imaginary Good, instead of substantial; and *false Truth* (if I may so speak) instead of *True*; that is to say, *Seeming Truth* instead of *Real*; which is what we commonly call by the Name of *Falshood*, as it is referred to our *Minds* and *Understandings*. Such a wrong Choice we continually make; and it is in This that the Folly of Mankind wholly consists, to This that their Misery is entirely owing. And as it is always their *Sin*, or their *Weakness*; so it is sometimes their *Punishment* too: There is such a

Thing



Thing as a *Judicial Infatuation*; when, Discourse  
IV.  
by the just Judgment of God, Men are given over to a pernicious and fatal Delusion: And it is This which the Apostle speaks of in the Words of my Text.

In the Beginning of This Chapter, he warns the *Thessalonians* against a Mistake which they were ready to fall into, that the Coming of Christ in Judgment, and the final Consummation of all Things, was then near at hand: A Delusion, which some Persons, or other, have ever been fond of in all Ages of the Gospel; Notwithstanding the positive Assurance given us by our Blessed Saviour, That of *That Day and Hour knoweth no Man*, there *Matth.*  
*xxiv. 36.* have still been Some so over-run with Dotage and false Prophecy, as to make Themselves and Others mad by pretending to foretel the Time of his Appearance. Against This, I say, the Apostle warns the *Thessalonians* in the Beginning of This Chapter: *Now we beseech you, Brethren,* *Ver. 1, 2.*  
*by the Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him, that ye be not soon shaken in Mind, or be troubled, neither by Spirit, nor by Word, nor by Letter as from us, as that the Day of Christ is at hand. Not by Word, nor by Letter as from us: For, it seems, they were inclined to That Opinion, not only*

Discourse

IV.

by the Predictions of some pretended Prophets, but partly by a Misunderstanding of some Passages in the Writings of the Apostles Themselves. As of Those Expressions, *The Lord is at hand; The coming of the Lord draweth nigh*; and the like: Some of which only signify that God is present, and ready, to protect and assist his Servants; Others are to be understood of the Destruction of *Jerusalem*: And if others are really spoken of the great Day of Judgment, there is no occasion of interpreting them as if they foretold its *immediate* and *speedy* Coming; since *a thousand Tears are with God but as one Day*, and Nothing in Comparison of Eternity; since likewise it is always at hand with regard to every particular Person, and it is our Duty and Interest always to be prepared for it. Having given This Caution, the Apostle takes Occasion to proceed Thus: *Let no Man deceive you by any Means: for That Day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and That Man of Sin be revealed, the Son of Perdition. Except there come a falling away first; i. e. until there come such a falling away, &c.* He prophesies, that the final Completion of all things should not come to pass, till there had happened a great and remarkable Apostasy, or De-  
section,

Ver. 3.

fection, of a considerable part of the World Discourse IV.  
 from the Purity of the Christian Religi- IV.

on, by *That Man of Sin, or Son of Perdition*. By whom is generally understood the grand Impostor, *Simon Magus*, That great Father of the *Gnostic* Heresy, and indeed of all other Heresies; who, working by Magick Art, and the Power of the Devil, performed many strange Things in Those Days, blasphemously calling himself God, and, by the Permission of Providence, miserably polluting the Church of Christ. He is particularly described, Ver. 3. *Who opposeth and exalteth Himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he, as God, sitteth in the Temple of God, shewing Himself (or pretending) that He is God.* Many, indeed, understand These Passages, as Prophecies of the *Romish* Corruptions, and the blasphemous Usurpations of the Papal See: And there is certainly sufficient Ground for such an Interpretation. But that the other is the first, and principal Sense, is plain from Ver. 7. *For the Mystery of Iniquity doth already work; Simon Magus having practised his Delusions, and broached his impious Doctrines, even in the Days of the Apostles.* And then shall the ver. 8, *Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the Breath of his Mouth, and shall destroy*



Discourse *destroy with the Brightness of his Coming.*

## IV.

*Even him, whose Coming is after the working of Satan, with all Power, and Signs, and Lying Wonders; and with all deceiveableness of Unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the Love of the Truth, that they might be saved. And for This Cause God shall send them, &c.*

The Words being Thus opened, and the Coherence of them with the Context plainly shewn; I shall farther discourse upon them in the following Method.

*First*, I shall consider the Nature of a *Delusion*, which is so strong as to make Men believe a Lye; and what is to be understood by That Expression.

*Secondly*, I shall shew, That such a *Delusion* is sometimes sent by God, and may be properly called a *Judicial Infatuation*; and shall also make out the Justice of God's Proceeding in such Cases.

*Thirdly*, I shall consider the deplorable Condition of Those who are so deluded; in order to deter Others from falling into it. And,

*Lastly*, Make some Observations, or Reflections, upon the foregoing Particulars.

I. *First*,

I. *First*, I am to consider the Nature of a *Delusion*, which is so *strong* as to make Men *believe a Lye*; and what is to be understood by That Expression. Discourse IV.

By That Expression then is not here to be understood, only yielding an Assent to a *Falshood in Fact*; which is commonly meant by *believing a Lye*: But Men's being so far deluded, as to believe *false Propositions* in Matters of the highest Consequence, and of the plainest Nature; *false Arguings*, *false Doctrines*, and *false Religions*; all These are in the Language of Holy Scripture frequently expressed by the Word *Lye*, and *Lying*; and one's assenting to any of These, deliberately, habitually, and perversely, is what the Apostle here means by *believing a Lye*. A Man is so *strongly deluded*, as to believe it in the Sense we are now speaking of; when the general Bent of his Soul is so turned by Prejudice, as to labour to believe it in spite of Evidence, and to abhor all the Means or Motives of Conviction. For though he cannot receive and embrace Falshood as such; yet he may labour to have a Thing seem true, which is really false, which he fears is false, and which he would fain think to be otherwise. This wholly proceeds from the

Discourse the Corruption of the Will; This, no

IV. doubt, is what St. John means by That  
 Rev. xxii. Expression, *Loving a Lye*; and This, I  
 15. conceive, is all that can be meant by

it, as it relates to a *Man's self*; As it relates to *Others*, one may indeed love it in the most strict and proper Sense: A Man may *really* and *heartily* desire to deceive *Others*, but not to deceive *Himself*. This latter he does only by *neglecting to be informed*, by *wishing he were in the Right*, and so endeavouring to persuade himself that he *is so*. For (as we said before) the Mind cannot embrace Falshood *as such*; all that it can do, is to labour to represent it under the Appearance of

2 Tim. iii. Truth. It is Thus that *Evil Men and*  
 13. *Seducers max worse and worse*; *deceiving, and being deceived*: Deceiving Others, and being Deceived both by Themselves and Others. By means of which, their Understandings may be utterly spoiled and corrupted; Their Judgments may be so perverted by Prejudice, and Partiality to their own preconceived beloved Opinions, as to assent to the most unaccountable Paradoxes and Absurdities. Could we imagine, did we not know it to be true, that a Man, a Creature of the same Composition, of the same excellent Nature with our selves, could ever have  
 believed



believed such amazing Inconsistencies as Discourse  
Those which made up the Religion of IV.  
the Heathen Idolaters? Could have conceived a Stock, or a Stone, to be a God? and the Work of his own Hands to be more powerful than Himself? Or, which was but little better, could have conceived, that a God, who was supposed to be really an Intelligent and Immortal Being, and to be placed in a Sphere above Humanity, could be subject to the Passions, Infirmities, Follies, nay to the most abominable Vices, and Corruptions, of the worst of Men? Much less, could we imagine that Men of the most exquisite Wit, Learning, and Sagacity, whose incomparable Writings at This Day are, and ever will be, the Admiration of the World, could digest such strange Opinions, as They did, concerning Religion, though not so ridiculous ones as Those before-mentioned? Than which if it is possible for any thing to be more ridiculous; it is the System of Those who value themselves, above all Mankind, upon being at the greatest distance from Idolatry: I mean the Mohometans; Whose *Alchoran*, or System of Religion, besides the bestial Impurity of it, is such a monstrous Heap of Absurdities, as it never entered into the Head of any Mortal to un-

Discourse understand: A Collection so wild, so  
 IV. inconsistent, and unintelligible, that a  
 Sick Man's Dream, in comparison of That,  
 is Rational and Judicious. And yet how  
 many Millions are so *strongly deluded*, as  
 to hold all This as Sacred, and given by  
 Divine Inspiration? Nay, even among  
*Christians*, whose Natural Reason is en-  
 lightened and improved by Divine Reve-  
 lation, are there not great Numbers who  
 have adulterated Christianity with al-  
 most as gross Idolatry as That of the  
 Heathen, and with full as gross Absur-  
 dities as Those of the Mahometans?  
 Who pay divine Honours to Creatures;  
 and insist upon it, that a Piece of Bread  
 is a Human Body; that is to say, that  
 our Reason and our Senses were given  
 us for nothing? To come nearer to Our  
 selves; have we not seen *Protestants*, and  
 Those too of our own Country, under  
 such *strong Delusion*, as to think they did  
*God Service* by the most outrageous Wick-  
 edness, and to commit the most unheard-  
 of Villanies, under the pretence of Re-  
 ligion, and in the *Name of the Lord*? If  
 ever Men *believed a Lye*, certainly *They*  
*did*; when they were possessed with such  
 a prodigious degree of Spiritual Infatua-  
 tion. Nay, do we not *Now*, in our own  
 Times, see so many Lyes and Contra-  
 dictions

dictions continually swallowed, that Truth seems to have almost wholly abandoned the World? In short, all Sorts of Enthusiasm, That numerous Spawn of Heresies, and Those various Schisms, which ever have infested, and still do infest the Christian Church, are so many Instances of Those *strong Delusions* which Men bring upon Themselves, and Others, or by the Judgment of God are brought upon them. These the Apostle positively foretels; *Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the Faith, giving heed to seducing Spirits, and Doctrines of Devils; speaking Lyes in Hypocrisy; having their Conscience seared with a hot Iron.* 1 Tim. iv.

I proceed now to the Second Thing I proposed, *viz.* to shew,

II. That the Delusion which the Apostle speaks of in the Text is sometimes sent by God, and may properly be called a *Judicial Infatuation*; and also to account for the Justice of That Proceeding. *God shall send them strong Delusion*, is the very Expression here made use of; and there are several other Places in Holy Scripture as plain to the same purpose. Particularly, Ezek. iv. 9. *And if the Prophet be deceived*



Discourse *when he hath spoken any thing, I the Lord*  
 IV. *have deceived That Prophet; and I will*  
 ~~~~~ *stretch out my hand upon him, and will de-*  
stroy him from the midst of my People Israel.
 And we are assured of the same Truth
 from the Words of Micaiah to Ahab; Now
 therefore behold the Lord hath put a Lying
 Spirit into the mouth of all These thy Pro-
 phets. I do not say that This Delusion
 always comes from God; Men may arrive
 at a very high Degree of it, by their own
 proper Folly and Wickedness. But it is
 plain that it sometimes does, from the
 Places of Scripture which I have produ-
 ced, and many others. But here the
 Difficulties seem to be great. Can God
 send Delusion? Can He, who is Truth
 itself, be the Author of Falshood and Er-
 ror? Can He be the Author of Sin to
 his Creatures, and then punish them for
 committing it? Where is the Holiness,
 the Mercy, the Goodness, or even the
 Justice of This? To all which Questions
 we may answer in general; That we
 may depend upon it God neither is, was,
 nor ever can be, the Author of any of
 These Things, so as to cast the least Re-
 flection upon his Justice or Goodness; but
 that He still remains Righteous in all his
 Ways, and Holy in all his Works; notwith-
 standing

1 Kings
xxii. 23.

Psal. cxlv.
17.

standing These dreadful Judgments and Discourse
 Inflictions: Which will appear very plain IV.
 and evident, if we consider These Two Things. ~~~~~

1. That by *God's sending* Error, Delusion, Hardness of Heart, and the like, is not to be understood a *positive Efficiency*, as if He were the proper Agent in it, or Producer of it; but we are to understand only his *giving the Person over* to himself, and withdrawing That Grace and Assistance which he before granted. He cannot be the Author of any Wickedness; but he may cease to prevent it; and he may in the Methods of his Providence so direct and dispose the Sins of Men, which they voluntarily commit, as to make Those Sins their Punishment. He cannot be the Author of Delusion; but Those who love to be deluded he may abandon to their own Fallacies and Errors: Then the Delusion of course will be strong; and so far only he may be said to send it. That This is the true State of the Matter, is evident from many parallel Places of Scripture. To mention One or Two of them: *Psal. lxxxi. 12. So I GAVE THEM UP unto their own Heart's Lust, and they walked in their own Counsel.* And *Rom. i. 24. God*

Discourse

IV. *GAVE THEM UP to Uncleanneſs; and*
Ver. 26. God GAVE THEM UP to vile
Affections.

2. To clear This Point, it is likewiſe neceſſary to conſider; *what ſort of Perſons* Thoſe are who are obnoxious to This heavy Judgment. And we ſhall find that they are ſuch as have long been Rebellious, and obſtinately Wicked; have reſiſted the cleareſt Evidences of Truth, abuſed the Grace of God; and grieved and done deſpight to his Holy Spirit. As it manifeſtly appears from the Places of Scripture juſt now mentioned, and ſeveral others. *Pſal. lxxxix. 12. But my People would not hearken unto my Voice, and Iſrael would none of me. SO I gave them up, &c. And Rom. i. 21. & ſeq. BECAUſE that when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God; neither were thankful, but became vain in their Imaginations, and their fooliſh Heart was darkened: Profeſſing themſelves to be Wiſe they became Fools; And changed the Glory of the incorruptible God into an Image made like unto corruptible Man, and to Birds, and four-footed Beaſts, and Creeping things: Then it immediately follows: WHEREFORE God gave them up unto Uncleanneſs. And Ver. 26. FOR THIS CAUſE God gave them*

them up unto vile Affections. And in the Discourse
 Words preceding my Text, the Apostle IV.
 speaks of Those that perish, BECAUSE
 they received not the Love of the Truth, that
 they might be saved. And then subjoins;
 And FOR THIS CAUSE God shall send
 them strong Delusion.' And where is the
 Injustice of all This? Or any thing like
 it? Men are voluntarily obstinate and
 perverse; therefore God, in executing
 Judgment, gives them over to their own
 Imaginations: They chuse and love Dark-^{John iii.}
 ness rather than Light; Therefore he^{19.}
 leaves them to go on in it, 'till they
 come to That outer Darknes, where there
 is Weeping, and Gnashing of Teeth. The
 Truth is, Nothing can thoroughly punish
 Sin, but Sin; As Vertue is part of its own
 Reward, so Sin is of its own Punishment;
 and that for the same Reason, and in more
 Senses than one; both as it is the Conse-
 quence of it, according to the natural
 Tendency of Things; and as it is in-
 flicted by the just Judgment of God.
 Which brings me in the Third Place to
 consider,

III. The deplorable Condition of
 Those who are thus deluded; that O-
 thers may be sensible of it, and take care
 to avoid it. The Consequence of it is no

Discourse less than Damnation; as St. Paul assures

IV. us in This Clause of the Text, *That they all might be damned that believed not the Truth, but had Pleasure in Unrighteousness.*

This perhaps does not imply *absolute* and *unavoidable* Damnation; but Damnation, if they continue Impenitent in such a State of Obstinacy and Perverseness. I say *perhaps* it is so; because it admits of a Doubt whether such Persons be capable of repenting, and whether they be not wholly abandoned and deserted by God. For when they have arrived at such a Height of Wickedness, as thus to do despite to his Holy Spirit, and maliciously disbelieve, or rather pretend to disbelieve, the Truths he proposes; it is greatly to be feared, *there remains no more Sacrifice for Sin, but a fearful looking for of Judgment.* However, This not being certain, it is safest to suppose otherwise: But if their Condition be not desperate, it is in the highest degree dangerous; and of all the most deplorable, next to Those which are desperate. As for the Case of Those, whose Ignorance or Error in disbelieving is involuntary and invincible; we determine nothing about them, but leave them to the Mercies of That God to whom they stand, or fall. But They certainly are either very Ignorant, or very Wicked,

Heb. x.
26, 27.

Rom. xiv.
4.

or

or Both, who pretend that it matters not whether we believe rightly, or no; and that it is indifferent what Persuasion Men are of, provided they live up to the best of their Knowledge. Though we by no means consign over to Damnation Those well-meaning Persons who are invincibly Ignorant of Christianity; yet it is most evident from the Scriptures, that they have no Right to the Promises of the Gospel, no Right to be saved according to the Tenour of the Evangelical Dispensation; in order to which, a true Faith is altogether as necessary, as a moral Life. But it is the Business of too Many, among us, to annul the Authority of the Scriptures; to take away the Distinction which is between Christianity and all other Religions; and to become as very Heathens, as the *Greeks*, and *Romans*. Those People were great Lovers of *Popular*, and *Republican* Schemes; for which Reason, I suppose, among others, our modern Pagans have such a Kindness for *That* Religion; though they are very far from practising *any*. Such a *levelling*, *confounding* Principle, as This, cannot but be highly provoking to Almighty God; and Those Men are in the greatest

Discourse Danger of being more *strongly deluded*

IV. *Themselves*, who are so very tender
and complaisant to the Delusions of
Others.

IV. I am now in the Fourth and Last Place to make some Observations or Reflections upon the Doctrine of the Apostle in my Text.

1. *First* then, We see that it is at least Lawful for the Ministers of the Gospel to do That, which is by Some very foolishly called *Preaching Damnation*; *i. e.* to enforce the Belief and Practice of Christianity, by urging the dreadful Punishment denounced against all Those who wilfully sin against Either. And I add, that This is not only Lawful, but our indispensable Duty: An Observation, which might seem very idle, and superfluous; were there not great Numbers whose Ears are too delicate to endure such harsh Sounds: They declare they love none but *smooth* and *soft Preaching*; *i. e.* Preaching with little or no Divinity, such as would shew them the Convenience of a Moral Life, or embellish some Matter of Fact from the Historical Part of the Old Testament; but never give them any Disturbance by Those indecent Words,
Hell,

Hell, and Eternity. Others there are, who can suffer the Mention of them, when it is applied to Murder, Adultery, and the like; but that it should be applied to Rebellion, Sedition, all sorts of Disobedience to Governors, both Civil and Ecclesiastical, Schism, Heresy, Infidelity, and such Things, is a Doctrine which they can by no means admit of. Because These are Things, which, they say, are to be excused, if not justified, by the *Natural Rights and Liberties* of Mankind, by *Diversity of Opinions*, and the *Freedom of Thinking*. And yet we are assured in Scripture, and we cannot help it, that *They who resist the Higher Powers, shall receive to themselves Damnation; That some Men shall privily bring in damnable Heresies; And that He that believeth not shall be damned.* In what Sense These Denunciations are made, and upon what Reasons they are grounded, Divines have abundantly explained both from Scripture and Reason; and it is not my Business at This Time to enlarge upon That Subject. As for Schism, or a causeless Separation from an established Church; if it be contrary to the express Commands of God delivered by the Apostle (and nothing can be more plain than

Discourse
IV.!

Rom. xiii.

2Pet. ii. 1.

Mark xvi.
16.

Discourse

IV.

than that it is so) is it not a Sin, and morally Evil? And are not *all Sins* in their own Nature damnable? For as to the Difference between Sins Mortal and Venial, we admit of no such *Popish* Distinction: Or if we did; *Schism*, of all Things, would gain nothing by it, according to the Doctrine of That Church. When therefore they tell us, that we damn People by Thus preaching against Schism; They may as well make the same Objection, when we preach against Murder, or Adultery, above-mentioned, or any Sin whatsoever. Is Schism a Sin, or is it not? If it be, must we not say it is? And will not the Consequence necessarily follow, whether we say so, or no? It is not by the *Preacher*, nor by the *Doctrine*, but by *Themselves*, that Men are damned: And to be warned against it, is not sure the way to fall into it.

2. From what nas been discoursed, it appears that Men are accountable to God for their *Understandings*, as well as for their *Wills*. I mean as to the Management and Regulation of Both All that we are accountable for indeed is, as such, *ultimately* resolvable into the *Will*; yet certain it is, that the Conduct of our Understandings

derstandings is very greatly in our own Discourse Power: Which we are assured of, not IV. only from Reason, but from Scripture; particularly from That of our Blessed Saviour; *Take heed that the Light which is in thee be not Darkness.* Luke xi. And considering³⁵ the vast Importance of That Conduct, it is not to be expected but that a strict and severe Account must be given of it. Were This well attended to, most of Those *soft Sayings* about *Weakness of Judgment*, living according to the *best of one's Knowledge*, nay *tender and scrupulous Consciences* too, would lose That *bewitching Force* which they have in the World, from their *Sound* rather than their *Significancy*. Such or such Persons among us, we are told, live, or believe, according to the *best of their Understanding*; and then it is supposed we are fully answered. But admitting the Fact to be true; why are their Understandings no better? Even because they are in the Number of Those *Fools* mentioned by the *Wise Man*, who *despise Wisdom and Instruction*, and wilfully refuse to be rightly informed. All Persons endued with common Reason have Talents sufficient committed to them: If they make no use of them, but labour on the contrary to spoil and pervert them;

Discourse them; shall That be urged as an Excuse?

IV. Or rather, is there any Crime that can itself want one more, or deserve one less?

3. From the foregoing Observation it follows, that our Understandings are *capable* of being *regulated*; that there is a *Rule* to controul and restrain them; and consequently that some Sorts of *Free-thinking*, falsely and improperly so called, are by no means allowable. What Use our Modern Infidels have endeavoured to make of That famous Word, is sufficiently known to the World. Some Men are resolved to be enslaved by Others, whether Those Others will, or no; and that too in point of *Thinking*, as well as of *Government*. As to the Latter; no Constitution, one would imagine, can be better calculated for the Liberty of Subjects, than This of Ours; and yet what Numbers are there among us, who will have it that they are Slaves, and are therefore continually Clamouring, when No body hurts them, about *Freedom*, *Tyranny*, and *Arbitrary Power*. In like manner, as to *Thinking*; The Christian Religion in general, and Our Church in particular, lay no more Restraint upon Men's Reason, than That Reason, if duly consulted, would lay upon

upon itself; and yet a * late Writer has Discourse
 assured his Countrymen, That the Ty- IV.
 ranny of Both is insupportable; and that
 the *Priests* (a Word in the frequent Re-
 petition of which he takes a great deal
 of malicious Pleasure) are for Shackling
 the Understandings of Men, and hin-
 dering them from their undoubted Privi-
 lege of *Free-thinking*. If by That Ex-
 pression be meant an ingenuous Enquiry
 after Truth, and making a right Use of
 their Reason; in the Name of God let
 them Think as freely as they please, and
 the more freely the better: This we
 not only permit, but persuade them to;
 and are always ready to join Issue with
 them upon That Principle. We are of
 Opinion, that *We* Think very freely,
 when we assent to such Propositions as
 These; That a plain Matter of Fact may
 be rationally believed, though done seven-
 teen hundred Years ago, when there is as
 much, nay far more Evidence, for the
 Truth of it, than for any other Fact at
 the same Distance of Time, which yet
 was never disbelieved, or so much as que-
 stioned by Any body; That *Faith*, both
 Human and Divine, is as Rational an As-
 sent, as *Free-thinking* a Habit, as any be-

* Author of the Discourse of Free-Thinking.

Discourse long to the Understanding; and that
 IV. we cannot reject it, without doing Violence to our *Natural Reason*; That God can communicate his Will to his Creatures; That we may rationally believe Things upon His Word, though we do not fully understand them; This being an Assent which we often yield even to one another, in relation to Arts and Sciences, and sometimes in the common Affairs of Life; That Human Understanding was never intended to comprehend All things; That Three or Four Mysteries may very well be allowed in Religion, when there are many more in Nature, and in Things with which we are daily conversant; That it is not only accountable, but highly reasonable, that there should be many Difficulties and Obscurities in Holy Scripture, to exercise our Faith, and mortify our Vanity; That These are no manner of Argument against the Truth of Those Books, since we have sufficient Evidence to prove them in the general to be the Word of God, and therefore are to believe the Whole, though we do not understand every Parr. This We take to be very *free Thinking*: But to let our Reason wander out of its due Bounds, and object against Points of Faith, after there

there is sufficient Proof that they come from God; to presume to fathom the Immensity of his Counsels, and to allow that His Thoughts are above Our Thoughts; to measure His Understanding by Ours, nay and set up Our own Judgment in Opposition to His; Is This *Free-thinking*? Yes, in the same Sense that a profligate Life is *Free-living*, and in no other. It is very *absurd Thinking*, if they please; very foolish and ridiculous, as well as impious and prophane. Reason, right Reason, disclaims the Homage which is paid to her, by These Professors in Wickedness, and Smatterers in Learning. Whose *Free-thinking* further displays itself, particularly in the Treatise I just now mentioned, not by pretending to overthrow any one of the main Arguments which prove the Truth of our Religion; but by Cavils and Exceptions at particular Difficulties, picked out here and there, after we have over and over granted that there are Difficulties, and proved that they are so far from being an Argument against our Religion, that they are rather a Confirmation of it. In such Cavilling indeed consists the very Spirit and Essence of Scepticism; which, besides many little Objections,

Discourse
IV.

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IV.

tions, with relation to the Points already mentioned, is abundantly shewn in the Tract I am speaking of, by These, and such like Arguments. The Canon of Scripture was for some time unsettled, therefore there is no such Thing as any Scripture at all: It is doubtful whether the Books of Authors, said to be Inspired, are Genuine, though no such Doubt was ever made concerning the Writings of *Homer*, or *Livy*, or any Prophane Author, concerning the Genuineness of which there is not half so much Evidence: There are Thousands of various Readings in the Scriptures, (though not above Three or Four pretended to be material) therefore Those Writings are of no Authority; an Argument never urged against any Human or Heathen Writer, though there is the same, or more Reason for it: There are various Prejudices in the World, therefore no such thing as Truth: *Solomon* speaks in the Person of One who believed not a future State, therefore he was of That Opinion Himself: The Priests differ among themselves in several Points of Divinity, therefore there is no Truth or Certainty in it: Some of them have said many unwarrantable, foolish,

and

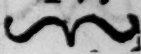
and false Things, therefore None of them are to be depended upon in any Thing. Such Reasoning as This, were it in Law, Physick, Politicks, or any part of Philosophy, would be called *Nonsense*; but in Religion, it seems, it is *Free-thinking*: So peculiar a Privilege have the Enemies of God and Goodness above all other Men. I do not say that This Writer draws These Arguments out into Form; but he makes every one of These Cavils, and some more which are too idle, and tedious to be mentioned: And he must either mean that These Conclusions should be made, or he means nothing at all. Then he adds a great Variety of Calumnies, and notorious Falshoods in Fact upon the Clergy in general, and some Eminent Persons in particular; and upon This hopeful Foundation raises such a Superstructure of Socinianism, Deism, Blasphemy, and Atheism, as has very seldom, if ever before, appeared in the World. These are the Champions of *Natural Rights*, who so earnestly advise us to think *like Men*; whereas, upon a Survey of their *senseless Reasonings*, joined with their *flaming Blasphemies*, we cannot but pronounce that they think like *Men* in neither respect, but like *Children* in

Discourse the *One*, and like *Devils* in the *Other*.

IV. And This is their *Liberty*! Never sure was any *Word* so vilely perverted; never was so Excellent a *Thing* so shamefully misrepresented. And that with respect both to *Acting*, and *Thinking*: In *Both* the *Higher Powers*, are, by vertue of This misapplied Sound, made subject to the *Inferior*. In the *First*, the *Rabble* are set above their *Governors*; in the *Last*, the *Animal* and *Sensitive* Faculties are set above the *Intellectual*. This is not *Liberty*, but *Licentiousness*; which in reality is the worst of *Slavery*: And in both respects above-mentioned it will ever be found, that true *Freedom* consists in *Obedience*, not in *Rebellion*; that the *Service* of God is *perfect Freedom*, and that there is the widest Difference in the World between *Laws* and *Tyranny*. In spite of all the *Aversion* which our *Infidels* have to *believing*, they do believe something; and That is a *Lye*. Which is the deplorable Condition of Those mentioned by the *Apostle* in my Text; and which suggests the last *Observation* I shall make from it.

4. Therefore it necessarily follows from what has been said, that nothing can be of greater Importance to *Man-kind*,

kind, than a *sincere and ingenuous Love of Truth*. How obvious soever This Remark may seem; it is no very easy matter to attain to such a Habit. Some, even Religious and Well-disposed Persons, are not so much in love with Truth, as they ought to be, and even think they are; but are too apt to content themselves with *superficial Views*, and *imperfect Notices* of Things. These are to be reminded, that they should evermore proportion their Assent to their Evidence; in the Search of which they should always be rationally Careful and Industrious; fixing in their Minds an habitual Abhorrence of Error and Falshood; and that even in little and inconsiderable Matters, as well as in deeper and severer Studies. For such is the *Pravity of Human Nature*, and the *Deceitfulness of Sin*; that, for want of strictly attending to Truth, we may by very *insensible Steps* be led into Errors, which we never thought of; Then Those Errors may beget Vices, and Those Vices yet greater Errors; till at last we arrive at the Condition of Those whom the Apostle mentions in my Text. Let us therefore heartily, honestly, industriously, apply our selves to the Knowledge of the

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L 2 Truth,

Discourse Truth, and receive it in the Love of it;
 IV. that the God of all Truth may enlighten
 our Understandings, and the Father of
 Lying and Delusion may have no Advan-
 tage against us.



The Nature of FAITH,
 as it belongs to the *Will*: Or, A
 Solution of That Question, How
 can an *Intellectual Assent* be a
Moral Vertue?

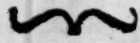
ROM. iv. 3.

*Abraham believed God, and it was counted
 unto him for Righteousness.*

NOT only in This Chapter, but in Discourse
 the greatest part of the Epistle to V.
 the *Romans*, the Apostle's Design is to
 shew the peculiar Force and Efficacy of
Faith in God, and in Jesus Christ; in
 opposition to all vertuous Works, which
 are done without it, whether under the
 Law of *Moses*, or any other Dispensa-
 tion. He attributes so much Energy to
 This Belief; That he not only makes it a
 most eminent and illustrious Vertue in it-
 self, or in its own single nature; but
 also teaches us, that it gives such a Tin-
 L 3 sure

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ture to all other our good Actions, and has such a prevailing Influence upon them, that it alone renders them so far acceptable to God, as (in conjunction with itself) to be made the Condition of our *Justification*, and obtaining Remission of Sins. All good Works whatsoever which proceed not from Faith, do not in the least entitle a Man to everlasting Salvation; and That for This Reason: Because, without Faith, they cannot be performed *as the Condition* of our Salvation, nor in Obedience to the Commands of Him who has proposed it to us. For how can a Man expect that Those Promises should be made good to him, which he never believed, and upon which he never depended? And how can he do any thing as the Condition of Salvation, when he does not believe it to be such? The Justification of *Faith in Christ* relies upon This, that He alone it is who has obtained Remission of Sins for us; the Promise of which is extended to None but Those who believe in him, and for *That Reason* obey his Commandments. Upon This Account it is that St. *Paul* in This Epistle generally uses the Word *Faith*, for the whole Complication of Christian Vertues, in contradistinction to the Works of the Law; *viz.* because it is the

the first and principal Part of Christiani-
ty, and the Root and Foundation of all
the rest. To shew the Power and Ex-
cellency of Faith, and the Vanity of
Those Works which are performed with-
out it, He brings the Example of *Abra-
ham*, the Father of the Faithful; whose
Obedience was founded upon his Belief
in God, and sanctified, and made accep-
table by it. This Instance he produces,
by way of Quotation, from *Gen. xv. 6.*
in the very Words of the Author of
That Book; *And Abraham believed God,*
and it was counted unto him for Righteous-
ness. In which Words, if *Belief* be taken
for his Faith, and his whole Obedience
as proceeding from thence; the Sense of
the Place will be This: *Abraham's* Obedi-
ence, being founded upon Faith in God,
was acceptable and well pleasing to him,
as such; and upon it he was justify'd, and
his Sins forgiven him. But if *Belief* be
taken for a single Act, as distinct from all
other Parts of his Obedience; the Mean-
ing will be This: *Abraham* believed in
God; and it was imputed to him, and ac-
cepted of him, as a very *laudable and ver-*
tuous Action. The Apostle in This Chapter
being engaged in the Dispute about Justi-
fication; the First of These Senses seems
principally to be intended by him. But

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V. the Words at the same time plainly imply the Other too: For if Faith be let to signify a whole Combination of Vertues, it is certainly a *Vertue itself*; And indeed the Reason why it is used in That large Signification, is because it is the first and radical Virtue; as I before observed.

Faith may be considered in a twofold Regard; either as it is an *Assent*, and belongs to the *Understanding*; or, as it is a *Vertue*, and belongs to the *Will*. I have in another * Discourse taken notice of it in the former Respect; though I do not pretend to have fully discussed That Subject; which has been so well treated of by Others, especially by our Incomparable Bishop *Pearson*, as to render all further Explications of it unnecessary. My Work therefore at This time shall be to consider it in the latter Respect; and,

First, To shew that Faith, or Belief, in God is a necessary *Duty* required of us; that the Performance of it is properly a *Vertue*; and the Violation of it a *Vice*.

Secondly, To explain the *Moral Nature* of it; and shew wherein This *Vertue* consists.

* Discourse III.

I. As

I. As to the First; In discoursing upon any other Vertue, it would be superfluous and improper to prove *that it is one*; This being taken for granted, and acknowledged by all who pretend to talk about it. And perhaps it is not *absolutely necessary* to be done upon This Subject; though there may be more Occasion for it upon This, than Others. Because *Faith* being in its first Notion used to signify an Act of the Understanding; whenever Men hear any Discourse upon the *Excellency* and *Laudableness* of it, they will be ready to ask, How can an *Intellectual Habit* be a *Moral Vertue*? Or how is it Praise-worthy to exert an Act of the Understanding, and give our Assent to a Truth proposed to it? Whoever rewarded a Man for having *Opinion* upon probable Evidence, or *Science* upon demonstrative? And why should *Faith* pretend to a Moral Excellency, any more than other Assents? These, and such like, Questions may possibly be asked by such as have more Philosophy, than Religion; and are not sufficiently instructed in the Doctrine of Christianity. The Truth is, *Faith* is purely a *Theological Vertue*, and belongs only to Revealed Religion, as distinguished from all Others. The Hea-
then

Discourse then Moralists were wholly ignorant of
 V. it; and therefore allowed it no place in
 their Ethicks, and never ranked it among
 the Vertues. The Proofs therefore to be
 urged for it, are to be fetched only
 from the Sacred Scriptures; which alone
 have recommended This Vertue to the
 World.

Now that Every thing has the Nature
 of a Religious Duty, which God has po-
 sitively commanded, is too plain to be
 proved: And that Faith is thus com-
 manded, appears from several Places in
 the New Testament. Very numerous are
 Those Texts in which This Duty is im-
 plied virtually, and by Consequence; but
 I shall mention none but Those in which
 it is peremptorily and directly command-
 ed. And even of These a few out of
 many will be sufficient. Our Saviour,
 at his first entering upon his Ministerial
 Office, begins his Preaching in These
 Words; *Repent, and believe the Gospel.*
 In which Words are commanded Two
 Things; Faith, and Repentance. And,
Mark xi. 22. Have Faith in God: And
 (to mention no more) *St. Paul exhorts*
Timothy in These Words; But thou, O
Man of God, follow after Righteousness, God-
liness, Faith, Love, Patience, Meekness.
 Where, among other Christian Duties,
 Faith

Mark i.
 25.

1 Tim. vi.
 21.

Faith, as distinct from them, is recommended. We have seen then that it is commanded by God; and consequently that it is a Religious Duty properly so called. And that the Performance of it is a Vertue in the strictest Sense, and that a very eminent one too, may be proved from hence, that Men are highly commended and rewarded for it; because nothing in us deserves Praise or Reward, properly speaking, but Vertue. When the *Roman* Centurion, in an humble and submissive manner, applied himself to our Saviour, beseeching him to heal his Servant, who was at the Point of Death; and gave such an ample Profession of his steddy Belief in him, as to declare there was no occasion for our Lord's Presence to heal the Patient, but that his Word alone would be an effectual Remedy; that Diseases and Devils would fly at his Command, and all the Parts of the Creation execute his Orders, as readily as a Servant does Those of his Master, or a Soldier of his General; our Saviour, to shew the highest Approbation of him, at once Commends, Rewards, and Confirms, his Faith. Commends it, by This extraordinary Declaration to his Followers, in which he expresses an Admiration of him; *Verily I*

say

Discourse say unto you, I have not found so great
 V. Faith, no not in Israel. Rewards it, by
 readily granting his Request; Go thy way;
 Matth. and as thou hast believed, so be it done un-
 viii. 13. to thee. And his Servant was healed in the
 self same Hour. Confirms it, by working
 another Miracle; more fully (if possible)
 to convince him of That Truth by his own
 Experience, which perhaps he believed
 before only upon the Testimony of o-
 thers.

And as it is eminently Vertuous thus to
 believe; so it is highly Criminal to dis-
 believe, and involves in it the Nature of
 a Vice properly so called. This appears
 from That Blame and Reproach with which
 it is loaded in Scripture; and That severe
 Punishment which is inflicted upon it:
 Because nothing but Vice is justly con-
 demned or punished. After our Lord's
 Resurrection, when he reasoned with
 the two Disciples in their Journey to
 Emmaus; He upbraids their Incredulity
 and Unbelief in These stinging and re-
 Lukt. xxiv. proachful Words: O Fools, and slow of
 25. Heart, to believe all that the Prophets have
 spoken. It is not to be imagined that he
 reflects upon their Understandings; or
 blames them for want of natural Parts
 and Apprehension. For it is not a Man's
 Fault, but his Misfortune, to be defective
 in

in his Intellectuals; and consequently our Saviour cannot be conceived to reproach them for *That*. The Folly and Stupidity therefore with which he taxes them, was not natural, but acquired; They might have prevented it, if they would; and their Unbelief proceeded from Prejudice, Carelessness, and Neglect. And as to the Punishment inflicted upon such Persons; we are told, *That he did not many mighty Works there, because of their Unbelief.* Had their not believing been occasioned either by want of sufficient Evidence in our Saviour, or of Ability in Themselves; He would have been so far from withdrawing Those Means of Conviction from them upon That account, that He would have done more mighty Works among them for That very Reason. But because he had already worked Miracles enough to give them a rational Assurance; and they still withheld their Assent, not for want of Evidence, or Ability to judge of it, but out of wilful Obstinacy and Perverseness; therefore, by way of Punishment, He abandoned them to themselves, and no longer tendered the Means of Salvation to them. But the heavy Punishment upon Infidelity is denounced in That Sentence of our Saviour, *He that believeth, and is baptized,* Mark xvi. 16.

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tized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned: i. e. He that believeth not after he has had sufficient Proofs, and the Means of Conviction have been fairly laid before him. But we need no other Argument to satisfy us of the great Guilt of Unbelievers, than the final Rejection of God's own People the *Jews*; a Punishment inflicted upon them, chiefly for their Infidelity.

Having thus shewn that *Faith is a Vertue* properly so called; I come now in the Second Place,

II. To consider the *Nature* of This Vertue, and shew *wherein it consists*. The great Difficulty in This Matter seems to turn upon the following Objection. Either there are sufficient Grounds for our Assent; or there are not. If there are; where is the Vertue of Believing That, which we cannot rationally disbelieve? If there are not; 'tis unreasonable to expect our Faith, and rather a Folly than a Vertue to believe,

For the Solution of This Difficulty, it is commonly answered; that there is some, and that considerable, Evidence, but not so bright and glaring, as necessarily to determine our Assent. The Vertue therefore lies in making up This Defect



fect by our own good Wills and Inclinations to the Truths which are proposed. But This Reply seems by no means satisfactory; but rather a Reflection upon our Faith, than a true Account of it. For the Question will still return, whether or no That Evidence be *sufficient*; i. e. so much as a Man would in right Reason be determined by, and so much as he is determined by in other Matters. If it be, and appear so to be; there is, I think, no Vertue in Assenting. For the Mind cannot but embrace Truth, as such; and is necessarily determined to it in credible, and probable, as well as demonstrable, Matters. Though the Thing assented to be not *necessarily true*; yet That Assent which properly belongs to it is *necessary*. And the Mind can no more withhold Faith, or Opinion, from a *credible*, or *probable*, Object, as such, than it can Science from a *demonstrable* one. This appears true by Experience; and is evident to any one that observes in himself the several Modes of Thinking, and Degrees of Assent. But, on the other side, if there be not sufficient Evidence; certainly neither God nor Man requires it as our Duty to believe. And if it do not appear so to us, we cannot believe; it being as impossible in This Case to yield our Assent, as it is in

Discourse in the other to deny it. Indeed, it is
 V. both a Sin, and a Folly, to demand such
 Proofs as the Nature of the Thing to
 be proved will not admit of; and to re-
 quire demonstrative Arguments in Mat-
 ters of Faith: But it is not only *lawful*
to demand, but *necessary to have*, such As-
 surance as belongs to the Matter in Dis-
 pute; before we can thoroughly be con-
 vinced of it.

The true way therefore of accounting
 for the Difficulty before us, seems rather
 to be This. We *have* sufficient Evidence
 in These Matters; and as much as a ra-
 tional Man would desire: It is so bright
 and glaring, as *necessarily* to determine
one Assent; viz. Faith; though the Things
 believed are not *necessarily true*, *i. e.* do
 not carry a *scientific* or *demonstrative*
Certainty along with them.

The Vertue therefore does not consist
 in the *immediate* and *actual Assent* itself;
 which wholly belongs to the *Understand-*
ing, and is not *morally Good or Evil*. But
 it consists in Those Things which are *Cir-*
cumstantial, and *Previous* to it. These
 Things belong to the *Will*, and are in
 our own Power; and consequently are
 capable of being *Vertuous* or *Vicious*.
 Though it is certain that we cannot but
 yield an Assent to Those Things which
 appear

appear to us to be true; yet we find by ^{Discourse} Experience, that our *Judgments* are often ^{V.} strangely influenced and biassed by our *Wills*, which hinder Things which are really true from appearing to us as such. Thus in the Case now before us: Though we have sufficient Evidence to convince us; yet we can never be convinced by it, unless That Evidence be actually laid before us, and throughly pondered, and considered by us. Now whether This be done, or not, is in our own Power; It is at our own Choice, whether we will consider a Thing, or no; whether we will enquire into the Means of Conviction, or industriously slight and neglect them.

But, not to dwell upon These general Considerations; the Circumstances which concur to the Composition of This Vertue, seem chiefly to be These following.

1. Honest Industry and Endeavour, in enquiring into the Means and Motives of Conviction.

2. A ductile and teachable Disposition; which is either free from Prejudice, or which (in spite of it) will give a fair Hearing to the Truths propounded.

3. Frequent and Diligent Consideration of the Things we believe, and the

Discourse

V.



Grounds of our Assent; so as to be habitually and thoroughly convinced of them.

First then, one Branch of This Vertue is honest *Industry* and *Diligence*, in enquiring into the Means of Conviction. It is evident at the first Mention, that This is in our Power; and that we are at Liberty to act, or not to act. We find by Experience, that when we doubt concerning the Truth of any thing, we sometimes examine the Evidence upon which it relies, and sometimes entirely neglect it. The latter we do; either because the Thing is trivial, and of no moment, and therefore will not reward the Pains we bestow in our Search after it; or because we are not willing it should be true, and are prepossessed in favour of a contrary Opinion. But These Matters of Faith are of the greatest Importance to us; and it most highly concerns us to be satisfied of their Truth, or Falshood. And therefore common Reason will tell us, that it is our indispensable Duty to examine the Testimony upon which they depend; notwithstanding the Labour of the Search, and the Reluctancy we may find in our selves to go through with it. For to what purpose were the Powers of Perceiving and Judging given us by Almighty God, unless it were to

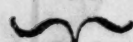
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to make use of them in Matters of the greatest Consequence? This is manifestly our Duty; and in the right Performance of it the Vertue of Faith partly, and in some measure, consists. Though indeed there is not so much *Vertue* in *doing* This, as *Vice* in *not doing* it. He that enquires into the Means of Conviction does well, and does his Duty; but he that wilfully neglects, or opposes it, sins against the universal Reason of Mankind, and the clearest Light of his own Conscience; and lays a Foundation for all manner of Vice and Wickedness. But that we are obliged thus impartially to weigh, and consider, the Arguments which are brought as Proofs of the Truths proposed to our Belief, appears from our Saviour's appealing to the Works which he performed; bidding the *Jews* consider them, and reflect upon the Evidence which they brought with them: And from his sending them to *Search the Scriptures*; which testified of Him, and proved that He was the true Messiah, by foretelling Those many remarkable Circumstances which were punctually verified and completed in Him.

2. Another considerable Branch of This Vertue is to be of a *ductile* and *teachable* Disposition, which is either free from

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Prejudice; or which in spight of That, and all other Obstructions, will give a fair Hearing to the Truths propounded. When we have impartially and diligently enquired into the Motives and Arguments which are produced to incline our Faith; and are fully convinced that the Doctrines contained in the Holy Scriptures are unquestionably Divine; Our Duty in the next Place is to come with an honest Mind, ready and prepared to receive Those heavenly Instructions which are there delivered. For the Force of Prejudice is so very great, that even after we are satisfied a Thing comes from God, it will (if we be not very careful and industrious) either deny it a full Hearing, or put some false and sinister Interpretation upon it. I confess indeed, the Power of Prejudice will generally take place, before we come so far as This; and hinder us from weighing and considering the Reasons which are urged to persuade us that Those Writings which are pretended to be Divine, are really so. For if a Man, confirmed in the Habit of Sin, be told that such a certain Book utterly forbids him to persevere in Those Courses, and denounces Damnation upon him, if he continues ir reclaimable; and that This Book is certainly

tainly dictated by God himself; It will be greater Danger that his Prejudice will hinder him from enquiring after, or even hearing, the Arguments which are brought to prove the Divine Original of that Book, than that (after he is so convinced) he should refuse to consider and receive the Doctrines contained in it. But however, I say, there will be some Danger even of This; and, if he be not very cautious, his Prejudice will be too hard for him in This Particular.

We have Instances more than enough of Persons who firmly believe the Scriptures to be the Word of God, and yet find Ways to baffle and elude Those Doctrines which contradict either their Vicious Inclinations, or even Those Tenets and Opinions which they are passionately fond of. It is our Duty therefore to resist and subdue These Corruptions; and (as the Apostle expresses it) *like new-born* 1 Pet. ii. 2. *Babes to desire the sincere Milk of the Word, that we may grow thereby.* Now Prejudice may be divided (like Ignorance) into Two Sorts; *viz.* That which is voluntary, and contracted by our own Fault and Mismanagement; or That which is unavoidable, and proceeds from Want of the Opportunities of Information. So

Discourse that *sometimes* it is directly sinful; and
 V. though at *other times* it be rather our
 Misfortune than our Crime, yet This is
 certain, that at *all times* it is our Duty to
 break through it, and in spite of all
 Obstructions faithfully and impartially to
 hear, read, and receive every one of
 Those Points which are delivered in Ho-
 ly Scripture as the Objects of our Faith.
 That This is in our Power, is manifest
 from Experience. Prejudice (like other
 bad Habits) is very difficult, but not im-
 possible, to be removed. It is practica-
 ble even for Those, who have it in the
 highest and most confirmed Degree, to
 dis-intangle themselves from it, and with
 free and unfettered Minds to make a
 right Use of the Reason which God has
 given them. And never certainly is This
 Duty more necessary; than when the
 Things to be considered come from God,
 and are of the utmost Moment and Con-
 cern to Us. For nothing can be a greater
 Affront to Him, than to refuse to hear
 him, when he speaks to us, or rightly
 to understand him; and nothing more
 pernicious to Our selves, than to shut our
 Eyes against the Light of Those Truths
 in which it is so much our Interest to be
 instructed.

But

But to be a little more particular: Discourse
Prejudice is like to be strongest, and the V.
Vertue of Believing, in opposition to it,
greatest, in all, or any one, of These fol-
lowing Circumstances.

1. When the Things proposed thwart
and contradict our Vices.

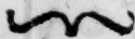
2. When they oppose our beloved O-
pinions. And,

3. When they transcend our Reason.

To give them a fair Hearing in spite
of all These Difficulties, and come to
them with a Mind willing to be instru-
cted, is our indispensable Duty; and in
doing This the *Vertue of Faith* in a great
measure consists. For This was the Faith
of the *Gentile Converts*, laudable and
glorious; viz. because they readily em-
braced the Doctrines of the Gospel, not-
withstanding the direct *Level and Ten-
dency* of them, against all Those abomi-
nable *Corruptions* in which they had so
long indulged themselves. No less ho-
nourable and Praise-worthy was the
Faith of the *Jewish Converts*; who, not-
withstanding their habitual Prepossession
in favour of the *Mosaick Customs, Rites,
and Ceremonies*, opened their Ears and
Eyes, effectually to receive the Truths of
Christianity, which cancelled and de-
stroyed them. But the Faith of Both
M 4 These

Discourse

V.



These Sorts of Converts was excellent in This; That they were not staggered at Those *sublime* and *amazing* *Mysteries* of the Trinity, Incarnation, and the like; which far transcend, and surmount, though they do not contradict, our Reason. Lastly, in all These Respects was the Faith of *Abraham*, the Example mentioned in my Text, *imputed to him for Righteousness*: For he left his *Father's House*, and the *Idolatry* and *Errors* of the *Heathen World*, at the Command of That God in whom he believed, and firmly acquiesced in the fulfilling of his Promises, notwithstanding the seeming *Impossibility* of it. This is insisted upon at large, both in the Book of *Genesis*, and in the Chapter of which my Text is a part. *Who against Hope believed in Hope, that he might become the Father of many Nations; according to That which was spoken, so shall thy Seed be. And being not weak in Faith, he considered not his own Body now dead, when he was about an hundred Years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's Womb: He staggered not at the Promise of God through Unbelief; but was strong in Faith, giving Glory to God: And being fully persuaded, that what he had promised, he was also able to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for Righteousness. This*

Ver. 18,
19, 20, 21,
22.

is

is a very illustrious and remarkable Place of Holy Scripture; in which This part of the Vertue of Faith is largely and clearly described. Notwithstanding all Those Difficulties, and Improbabilities, he stedfastly believed: He would not suffer his Prejudice to hinder him from attending to what was spoken; and then (being satisfied that it was spoken by God) he could not but believe it. By This Faith he obtained so good and honourable a Report; that he was stiled *the 2 Chron. Father of the Faithful, and the Friend of* ^{xx. 7.} God.

Thus have I dispatched Two of the Particulars I mentioned; and shewn that This Vertue consists, *1st*, In honest Industry and Endeavour, in enquiring into the Means of Conviction, or Those Arguments which are urged to convince us that the Things proposed to our Belief were really delivered by God. But because even after we are persuaded of This, we may by Custom and Prepossession be hindered from actually attending to, and reflecting upon, some particular Things which we are prejudiced against, or be biassed to put some wrong Construction upon it; therefore I have shewn that This Vertue consists, *2dly*, In being of a ductile and teachable Disposition, which

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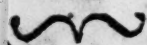
Discourse is either free from Prejudice; or which,
 V. in spight of that, and all other Obstruc-
 tions, will give a fair Hearing to all
 the Truths propounded. It is, no doubt,
 an indispensable Duty we owe to God,
 not only to believe in general that what-
 ever he says is true; but also to consider,
 and reflect upon every particular Point, in
 order to our believing *That* by itself, be
 it never so repugnant to our Opinion,
 Humour, Interest, or Inclination.

3. It consists in *frequent Consideration*
 of the Things we *already believe*; in of-
 ten turning and revolving in our Minds
 both the Grounds, and Motives, of our
 Faith, and also Those Points which are
 proposed as the Objects of it. This
 Branch is as necessary to *strengthen, con-*
firm, and secure our Faith, as the Two
 former are at first to *lay the Foundation*
 of it. And 'tis to the Want of This that
 we may ascribe most of the Wickedness
 and Irreligion, with which the Christian
 World at This Day abounds. As there
 are but very few downright Infidels a-
 mong us, who wholly disbelieve the Chri-
 stian Religion; so there are but few who
 are so steddy and perfect Believers as they
 ought to be, and may be, if they will be
 at the Pains to make themselves so. Ask
 them, whether they are persuaded of the
 Truth

Truth and Excellency of the Evangelical Discourse Dispensation, and that the Bible is the V. Word of God; and they will certainly tell you, they are: Nay, 'tis great odds but they will take it very ill to have such a Question put to them. But if you ask them, *What* they believe, and *Why* they believe; what Those Points are to which they yield their Assent, and what the Grounds upon which they yield it; I fear a great Number of Those who call themselves Christians (even of Those too who are capable of informing themselves better) will find themselves at a loss for an Answer. And This will hold true, not only of Those who violate their Duty in the Two Instances above-mentioned, and never enquire into the Means of Conviction; or (if they do) yet refuse, through Prejudice, to examine and consider all the Truths proposed to them: I say, This Observation concerning Ignorance in Matters of Faith, will hold true not only of such Persons, but likewise of many Others who have at first laid a good Foundation for their Belief; have honestly and industriously weighed the Arguments, and been convinced by them; and have brought a teachable and ductile Disposition to receive and embrace all the Doctrines,

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Doctrines, without reserve or exception. And This Ignorance in Them can proceed from nothing, but Want of That frequent Consideration of which I am now speaking. For it is not enough so to prepare our Minds at first, as to dispose them for the reception of the Truths of the Gospel; but we must also use great Caution and Diligence all our Lives long, to preserve and keep alive, and even to strengthen and encrease, That Faith which is begun in us. And the only Way to do This is often to read the Holy Scriptures; frequently to recollect in our Minds the Things we believe, and the Grounds upon which we believe them; to insist and dwell upon These Thoughts, 'till our Faith is become strong, robust, and habitual, and cannot be easily shaken or unsettled. A Man may once believe All that is required of him; and be able to give a rational Account why he does so: But without This diligent and frequent Reflection, all, or most, of Those Notices which he at first received will slide out of his Memory; his Faith will become weak, languid, and remiss; it will be dead not only in its Consequences and Effects, but even in itself; and at last become so inconsiderable as to be little better than

no

no Faith at all. Habits are not to be ^{Discourse} acquired without many and repeated ^{V.} Acts; without much Time, and much Labour: Nor can we expect that the Grace of God (which is given to None but the Industrious) will ever be assisting to us, unless we use the best of our own Endeavours. 'Tis for Want of This therefore that the generality of Christians have so little true Faith in them; though they love to talk so much about it. They believe something, but they cannot well tell what: For Want of thus turning and revolving These Things in their Minds, and studying the Scriptures, which alone are able *to make them wise unto Salvation*, they have only some faint Remembrance, some confused and obscure Conceptions; which are of no Use to them, but to make their Opinions erroneous, and their Practice unchristian. To keep our selves from falling into such a State as This, by often reflecting upon what we believe, is evidently our Duty; and the Performance of it is an eminent Part of the Vertue upon which I am discoursing. When we once believe, we must (as *St. Paul* speaks upon another Occasion) *stir up the Gift which is in us*, by ^{2 Tim. i.} much Thinking; and *grow in Faith*, that^{6.} we may *grow in Grace*. And as it is our Duty

Discourse **V.** Duty to preserve our selves from sinking into This dangerous Condition; so ought we to be careful to extricate our selves out of it, after we are fallen into it: To awake Those Notions which lie slumbering in our Minds; to review the Arguments which first determined our Assent, and examine in particular all Those Doctrines which we pretend in general to believe. That These Things are in our Power, is so plain, that I need not prove it: Experience sufficiently assuring us, that we are at Liberty to set our selves industriously to think, and meditate upon any Subject; or to sit still and acquiesce in the gross Ignorance of That, which we do not care to be at the Pains of knowing.

The

The *Unjustifiableness* of Separation from the ESTABLISHED CHURCH considered; From the *Easiness* of our Terms of Communion; and the Duty of Submission to Ecclesiastical Authority.

2 KINGS v. 13.

And his Servants came near, and spake unto him, and said; My Father, if the Prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash and be clean?

ONE of the worst and most dangerous Corruptions in Human Nature, is what we call *Self-Will*, or an Obstinacy and Perverseness of Disposition. It discovers itself early in Children; and Those who have the Care of Education, find nothing more difficult than to weed out a Principle so deeply rooted in the very

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very Constitution of Mankind. And yet nothing is more necessary to be done in the forming and modelling of tender Minds, than to free them betimes from This Impediment. It is This Principle that renders Men stiff and untractable; ill-natured to Others, and over-fond of Themselves; deaf to good Advice, and blind to their own Interest: Than which it is impossible for any thing to be more prejudicial to our Affairs, or a more effectual Bar to our Happiness.

The Chapter, of which my Text is a Part, gives us an Instance of This positive Humour; but of such a one as was not Proof against all Instruction. The Person therefore here mentioned being blameable on the one hand, and not incorrigible on the other; his Example seems to take in whatever is necessary to be said upon This Subject. As *all Scripture* is in some respect or other *written for our Learning*; there are few material Passages even in the Historical Part of the Old Testament, which may not, if duly applied, be of excellent Use to us in the Conduct and Regulation of our Lives. This, which we are now upon, is one Instance of what I have asserted: And because it is a Passage very remarkable, I shall open it by way of Introduction to
what

what follows. The Occasion of it was Discourse
This: VI.

Naaman, a Subject to the King of *Syria*, and Captain-General of his Forces, labouring under the loathsome Disease of Leprosy, was informed by a Captive Maid of the Land of *Israel*, who lived as a Servant in his Family, that there was a Prophet in *Samaria*, who was certainly able to cure him of his Distemper. Upon This, after some other Circumstances not material to our present Subject, he comes with great Pomp and Retinue to the House of *Elisba*. The Prophet directs him by a Messenger to go and dip himself seven times in the River *Jordan*; with an Assurance that upon the performance of That Ceremony, *his Flesh should come again to him, and he should be clean*. *Naaman*, though a Leper, was a Person of the highest Quality; and it is likely he took it ill that no more Respect was paid to him as such; though we may be sure *Elisba* had a very good Reason for his Behaviour. However That be, the great Man was very angry; and utterly disapproved of the Method which the Prophet had prescribed; proposing another Form and Manner of his own imagining. And so high was his Resentment, that (as the Sacred Historian expresses it)

Discourse VI. *he turned and went away in a Rage. After which the Words of my Text immediately follow: And his Servants came near, and said unto him, My Father, if the Prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst Thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he saith unto thee, wash and be clean? This was the wise and faithful Advice of his Servants; and their Master, though heady and high-minded, was not incurably obstinate: He suffers himself to be guided by their Counsel, and diverted from his rash Resolution: He obeys the Prophet's Direction; the Success answers accordingly, and the Leper is immediately and miraculously cleansed.*

From This Account of a particular Fact may be raised many useful Observations relating to Religion and Morality; whether we consider our selves with regard to Christianity in general, or to the Communion of That National Church which is happily established among us. I shall make no Remarks, but such as naturally arise from the Matter before us; and, confining my self by That Rule, I think I may properly make These Six following.

I, That what Religion both directly and indirectly enjoins, is (if it be right-ly

ly estimated) *no great Thing*; nothing that we have reason to complain of, as grievous or burthensome. Discourse VI.

II. That were its Injunctions really severe; yet, even Then, considering the Reward, it would be the utmost Folly, as well as Ingratitude, to refuse the Conditions: And consequently it is much more so, since the Case is quite otherwise, and we have *no great thing* imposed upon us.

III. That some Men, through the Perverseness of their Nature, are inclined to approve of no Methods for their Welfare and Happiness, but only such as are of their own inventing; sometimes even in opposition to Those which are prescribed by the Authority of God Himself: And that, as a Consequence of This, they are apt to contradict Those very Persons by whom they ought to be directed; especially to oppose them, if the Matter in question be only a *Mode* or *Circumstance* of the Thing enjoined.

IV. That such a Principle is upon all Accounts utterly unjustifiable. And therefore,

V. That there is no Reason to expect that Those who are, and ought to be, Directors, should submit and yield the

Discourse Point to Those who ought to be directed.
VI.

VI. That it is the Duty of such Persons to take kindly the Admonitions of their Advisers; and in compliance with them to reform That Fault which was always unjustifiable, and, if persisted in after such Admonitions, must be inexcusable.

These Observations I shall enlarge upon, so far as the Limits of This Discourse will permit; applying each of them, as I go along, to the particular Circumstances of Those who are most nearly concerned in them.

I. The first Thing I observed was This; That what Religion both directly and indirectly enjoins, is (if it be rightly estimated) *no great Thing*; nothing that we have Reason to complain of, as grievous or burthensome. I mention the Words *directly* and *indirectly*; because the greatest Part of what I shall insist upon, relating to the Institutions of a National Church, would otherwise perhaps be objected against, as not belonging to Religion, but only to Human Ordinances or Appointments. To obviate which Exception, I here take notice, that if our Religion

ligion does not directly and immediately command our Obedience to such or such particular Institutions of our Church, specifying Those Institutions in so many Words, as it is from the Nature of the Thing impossible it should; it does it however virtually and consequentially, by commanding us to *avoid Divisions*, and in all Things lawful to *obey them that have the Rule over us*.

But to begin with the First. As we are *Christians*, we have but very few *positive* Commands imposed upon us; and Those are not attended with the least degree of Trouble or Difficulty. *Baptism*, and the *Supper of the Lord*, are the only Sacraments which Christ hath instituted: By the One we are to *wash and be clean* in the Waters of Regeneration; by the Other in the Blood of our crucified Saviour. As for the *Moral* Precepts, they are all agreeable to our Reason, and perfective of our Nature. While we *act* in Conformity to them, we are powerfully assisted by the Grace of God; and find much *present* Pleasure and Satisfaction in the performance of them. The Things we are to *believe* are not Points of idle Speculation, designed only to puzzle and amuse us; but they are Points of the utmost Moment, such as influence our

Discourse Practice, and have a direct Tendency to
 VI. our Happiness. And if Some of them
 exceed our Comprehension, that is no
 manner of Hardship upon us; since even
 There we have sufficient Evidence to de-
 termine our Assent, and prove it to be
 highly Rational; it being no unreason-
 able Imposition upon us, that we are re-
 quired to believe what God says, though
 we do not fully understand it. Then
 for the Difficulties we meet with in the
 practical Part of Christianity, through
 the Struggle and Resistance of our cor-
 rupt Appetites; They are not chargeable
 upon Religion, but upon Our selves; up-
 on our own Follies, and vicious Customs.
 Besides, the Grace of God is always
 ready to aid and assist us: And if we
 will but resolutely endure some Uneasi-
 ness for a time, we shall be infinitely
 overpaid by the Satisfaction which fol-
 lows. So that, even to put it at the lowest,
 Vertue has far more Pleasure, and less
 Pain than Vice, even in This present Life.
 Upon the whole therefore, the Religion of
 1 John v. Jesus Christ does not *bid us do any great*
 3. *thing: His Commandments are not grievous;*
 Matth. xi. *but His Yoke is easy, and His Burthen is*
 30. *light.* The Prophet Micah having intro-
 duced a Person making This important
 Enquiry;

Enquiry; *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow my self before the high God?* VI. Discourse

Shall I come before him with burnt Offerings, with Calves of a Year old? Will the Lord *Micah vi.* 6, 7, 8.

be pleased with thousands of Rams, or with ten thousands of Rivers of Oil? Shall I give my First-born for my Transgression, the Fruit of my Body for the Sin of my Soul? The Divine Oracle being Thus consulted, immediately returns the following Answer: He hath shewed thee, O Man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love Mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

Thus then as we are Christians. And if we consider our selves, as we are required to be Members of the Established Church; here again what *great thing* is imposed upon us? We are only required to be Members of the best Church in the World, established by the Authority of the Legislature, to which we are born Subjects; a Church Primitive and Apostolical in its Polity and Doctrines, excellent in its Liturgy, and Canons, and Manner of Worship, which is attended with no Ceremonies but such as are proper and edifying, avoiding the Extremes of too much Pomp on the one hand, and of too little Decency on the other. Though I cannot here enlarge upon These Particulars,

Discourse particulars, yet I do not beg the Question;
 VI. because what I affirm has been over and
 over sufficiently proved in many unan-
 swerable Treatises. Is it a *great thing*
 then to conform to such a Church as
 This, when it is established too by the
 Authority of our Governors; and to com-
 municate with our Brethren and Fellow-
 Subjects under so excellent and well-
 ordered a Constitution? Is This so un-
 reasonable an Imposition, a Burthen so
 intolerable? Or farther, suppose, for the
 greater Strength of the Argument, our
 Church were not so Excellent as it has
 been often proved to be; it is *lawful* at
 least to Communicate with it: which the
 greatest Part of our Separatists, if not all
 of them, do Now readily acknowledge.
 And if so, the Consideration of *Establish-
 ment* and *Constitution* being put into the
 Ballance, ought certainly to weigh against
 any particular Person's private Judgment,
 though he thinks another Way of Wor-
 ship may be better than That which is so
 Established. Some Years since indeed
 They roundly asserted the Unlawfulness
 of our Worship: Advancing, among others,
 This monstrous Paradox, That, with refe-
 rence to the Service of God, Things in
 themselves indifferent become unlawful
 by being commanded; and in some par-
 ticular

ticular Instances accusing us of Popery, Discourse
Superstition, and Idolatry. But Those, VI.
and such like Assertions they have now, ~~~~~
I think, quitted as untenable; excepting
that they cannot forbear their Reflections
about Popery, because our Church retains
some Things which are used in the Ro-
mish Communion. But never was any
Charge more absurd, as well as odious
and invidious. We have rejected Every
thing that is Unlawful in the Church of
Rome, Every thing that is contrary ei-
ther to the Scriptures, or to Primitive
Christianity; and That, one would
think, should be sufficient. For if Eve-
ry thing be Popery which the Papists
do; then it is Popery to Pray, and to
Preach, and to Administer the Sacra-
ments; nay, it is Popery to Eat and
Drink, as well as to use the Cross in
Baptism; and to wear any Clothes at
all, as well as to wear a Surplice. We
cannot here avoid enquiring who Those
are, who are most *Willing*, and *Able*, to
oppose Popery; whether the Members of
our Church, or Those who separate from
it? And who Those were, who about
Twenty six Years ago actually did oppose
it at the extremest Hazard of all that was
dear to them, except their Consciences;
by publishing a vast Collection of the best
Treatises

Discourse VI. Treatises against Popery that ever yet appeared in the World? Were they not the Clergy of the Church of *England* who did This? When there was really Danger of Popery, They thus exerted themselves; while Those, who always raise such an Outcry about it, when there is no immediate Danger of it, unless it be of their own making, were Then either very still and quiet; or very much contributed to forward the Encroachments of Popery, against which they are at other times so unnecessarily clamorous.

With as little Reason are we accused of *carrying Things too high*; a new-invented Phrase very much in the Mouths of Men; but of no Signification. If endeavouring to secure our Constitution deserves That Name; we grant the Charge; otherwise there is no Colour for such an Exception. What Excesses do we run into? What Changes or Additions do we make? If it be proved that we approach one Tittle nearer to Popery, than our first Reformers did, or than We ought to do; we will be bound to give up the whole Cause. There is nothing therefore in These Objections; which are only a Sett of popular Phrases made use of by Those who have either a very ill Meaning, or no Meaning at all.

No-

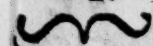
Nothing then being unlawful, or even Discourse
justly exceptionable in our Communion; VI.

is it a *great thing* to comply with it, and conform to it? Those who think it is, have never yet been able to prove Their own Ecclesiastical Discipline to be so much as warrantable or lawful; and they do not so much as pretend to shew that Ours is otherwise. We, on the contrary, prove our Plan of Church-Government to be of Primitive and Apostolical Institution: And as for our Liturgy, What can be better adapted to the Uses of Piety and Devotion? A great Part of it is taken out of the Holy Scriptures; and some of it from the ancient Liturgies of the Primitive Church: For the Primitive Church used Forms of Prayer, not *Ex-temporary* Effusions; than which latter nothing can be more contrary to good Sense, to Edification, and Devotion, to Order and Regularity, and to That *Reverence* Heb. xii. and *Godly Fear* with which the Throne of^{28.} Grace ought always to be approached.

But the great Stumbling-Block of all, it seems, is the Use of our Ceremonies: Against which one would have imagined there should not be the least Appearance of any Exception; because they are on all hands acknowledged to be Things in themselves indifferent. Is it not strange, that

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that a piece of *Linnen Cloth*, which was before very harmless, should immediately become the Subject of so many Objections, when it is fashioned into a Garment to be worn in Divine Service? Is there Magick or Inchantment in the Shape, that it should give Offence to any Creature that pretends to the Use of Reason? Why should the Sign of the *Cross in Baptism* be a Point so difficult to be surmounted? When we declare in our Rubrick, (and Every body very well understands us) that we make no Superstitious or Idolatrous Use of it; but mean it as a mere Form, or Ceremony, in the Administration of That Sacrament. And can there be a more proper Form at our Baptism, than such a one as puts us in mind of the Cross of Christ, into whose Religion we are baptized? To which it may be added, that the Primitive Christians used This Ceremony much more than We do, not only at Baptism, but upon other Occasions, long before there was any such Thing as Popery in the World; though they did not use it perpetually, upon all Occasions, with That ridiculous Foppery, as the Papists now do. Lastly, since *Kneeling* is by the Custom of most Nations, particularly of Our own, used as a Posture expressing Reverence and Supplication;

plication; why should we not use it at the Holy Communion? Nay, what can be more Irreverent and Indecent, than to receive That Sacrament in any other Posture; especially That of *Sitting*? For as to any Adoration pretended to be paid by us to the consecrated Elements, our Adversaries themselves do not now object it; and it is wonderful they ever should, after so express a Declaration which our Church in her Rubrick has made to the contrary. Behold the mighty Objections against Conformity to the Church of *England*! These which I have instanced in, are the *great Things* which the Prophet bids us do; much less than what was imposed upon *Naaman*; much less difficult and troublesome than his dipping himself in *Jordan* seven times. And yet all the main Exceptions of our Sectaries do not amount to more than what I have mentioned. These Trifles, These Shadows, These Nothings of Objections are the great Hindrances of Uniformity among us. And here upon These frivolous Pretences, Those, who pretend to be the Disciples of Christ, must make Shipwreck of That Peace, and Concord, and Brotherly Love, which is the most distinguishing Badge and Glory of Christianity. What would they have said,

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Discourse said, or done, had our Terms of Communion, though lawful, been indeed difficult and rigorous? Which puts me in mind of my Second General Head; in which I am to shew,

VI.

II. That were the Injunctions of Religion, and of our Church, really severe; yet even Then, considering the Reward of our Obedience, it would be the utmost Folly as well as Ingratitude, to refuse the Conditions; and consequently it is much more so, when the Case is quite otherwise, and we have no *great thing* imposed upon us. *Had the Prophet* (says the faithful Adviser in my Text) *bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he saith unto thee, wash and be clean?* As if he should have said; "Since the Recovery of your Health is so great a Happiness; had the Prophet prescribed you a very rigorous and painful Remedy, is it possible to be imagined that my Lord could have refused it? How much more reasonable is it, that you should comply with his Directions, when he imposes nothing upon you, but what is so very easy, and utterly disproportionate to so invaluable a Blessing?" And Thus may we argue.

Had

Had the Christian Religion charged us with Burthens ten times more grievous than the Jewish, besides what it has actually commanded us; yet the Happiness of Heaven being a Reward infinitely greater than any thing we are capable of deserving by the most rigorous of our Actions, and the most bitter of our Sufferings; even Then we should have no Reason to complain, but on the contrary should be the most foolish, as well as ungrateful of Men, should we not embrace the Conditions with Joy and Thankfulness. Much more, when, all Things considered, the Burthen is light; when the Terms are so easy, that God makes us Happy in the next World, as a Reward for making our selves so in This! In like manner, had the Established Church imposed real Hardships upon us; yet Peace and Unity are such blessed Things, and the Reward of Those who promote them in the World is so great; that a wise and good Man would join in its Communion even upon such Conditions. Much rather would he do so, when the Case is quite otherwise; and the Terms of Communion are so very easy.

But here it is possible we may be asked, whose Fault it is that These Divisions are

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are kept up among us? Because They who are the only Authors of them are always most forward to put That Question; to talk of Peace, Charity, and Unity, to charge the Members of the Church with the Want of Those Qualities, and upon Them to lay the blame of our Confusions. Now We are altogether as ready to answer This Question, as They are to ask it; and desire nothing more than that they would seriously consider the true Solution of it. There are, no doubt, some Faults of one kind or other, on all Sides, though not in the Cause, yet in Those who defend it: As long as Men are Men, it is not to be expected, but that the Defenders of the best Cause in the World should sometimes fall not only into Errors and Indiscretions, but even into Sin. But still, notwithstanding This, there is a wide Difference in the Circumstances. All are not *equally* in fault; but there is a *fundamental* Crime somewhere or other; to which the Evils we complain of are *principally*, and *originally* to be ascribed. Now though there are other Distinctions of Parties among us, besides That which relates to the Established Church, and Those who separate from it; yet it is plain, that This has given Birth to all the rest; and Those new Names, which, in an evil Hour,

Hour, and with no good Design, were ^{Discourse} invented to distinguish Churchmen from ^{VI.} one another, are referred to Those who are, or are supposed to be, more or less Favourers of That Separation. That Separation therefore being fairly to be looked upon as the Cause of our other publick Divisions; I shall speak only to That, as including all the rest.

Now it is generally agreed (as I said) among Those who dissent from us, that the Terms of our Communion are not unlawful; but only they like Their own way better than Ours. If That be all (as they acknowledge it is) are they not inexcusable in refusing to join in our Communion? If Love, and Charity, and Unity are such excellent Things, as they certainly are; ought not Mens private Opinions in some small Matters to be sacrificed to the Practice of such excellent Vertues? Ought they not rather to recede from their Opinions, and refuse to gratify their Humours, than to divide the Church of Christ, and rend it in Pieces by Schisms and Factions? If the Bond of Peace, as they truly say, be so carefully to be preserved; why do *They* break it? Break it for such Trifles, and upon such very inconsiderable Pretences? How can they have the Confidence to

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retort That Accusation upon the Church, and charge her obedient Members with causing Divisions? Do We dissent from Them, or They from Us? *Ours* is the *Establishment*, as I take it: And if they may *lawfully* Communicate with us, it is their indispensable *Duty* to do so: Unless they will say that Schism is no Sin, or that there is no such Thing as Schism in Nature; contrary to the express Doctrine of Holy Scripture; as I shall shew in its proper Place. So that *They* really cause all That Breach of Peace, about which they themselves are perpetually talking; and all the unhappy Consequences of it. For it is next to impossible, but that Separation from an Established National Church should cause Quarrels and Animosities. It is natural for Men to be eager and vehement in the Defence of their own Cause, and in opposing all others. From whence Anger and Fury, Hatred and Uncharitableness, will almost unavoidably ensue. And though both Sides, no doubt, are more or less Guilty in This Respect; yet even here there is always a manifest Difference: and Those are most apt to be angry and abusive, who have the worst Cause and the least Reason. And besides, Those of the one Side commit a grievous Sin by Attacking; and Those

Those of the other, do their indispensable Duty by Defending. But however That be, as he who begins a Quarrel may be truly said to be the Cause of all the Blows that are struck, and the Blood that is spilt, on both Sides; so Those who are the unreasonable Separatists from a National Church, being the Original Authors of Divisions, are in a great measure answerable for all the Uncharitableness, Rage, and Fury, not only of Their own, but of the Opposite Side; Though Those of the Opposite Side, are not thereby excused or justified.

III. The Third Observation I made was This: That some Men, by the Perverseness of their Nature, are apt to approve of no Methods for their Welfare and Happiness, but only such as are of their own inventing; sometimes even in opposition to Those which are prescribed by the Authority of God Himself: and that as a Consequence of This, they are apt to contradict those very Persons by whom they ought to be directed: especially if the Matter in question be only a Mode or Circumstance of the Thing enjoined.

Difficulty is a Thing which Men are not commonly much in love with; and

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VI. yet Some would rather have difficult Methods of their own imagining, than easy ones proposed by God, or his Ministers. It is very likely indeed that *Naaman's* Anger proceeded not *only* from Perverseness and Self-Will; but partly from the Highness of his Spirit, and the Sense he had of his own Quality. He expected that the Cure would have been performed with more Pomp and Solemnity: And though That Reasoning of the Servant was just, *Had he bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it?* Yet it appears that the Master argued quite otherwise; and disliked the Method prescribed him, for That very Reason, because it was *not some great thing* with respect to outward Appearance and Ostentation. Here we may observe by the way, that true Miracles are *plain*, and *simple*, as were Those of *Moses* and the Prophets in the Old Testament, and Those of our Blessed Saviour, and his Apostles, in the New; but that counterfeit ones are attended with Parade and Show, as were Those of the ancient Heathen, and modern Papists. However That be; *Naaman* was for dictating another Manner of Proceeding, than That which the Prophet had recommended: *Behold*, says he, *I thought he will surely come out to me, and stand, and call*

Ver. 11.

of Separation.

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call on the Name of the Lord his God, and strike his Hand over the Place, and recover the Leper. He thought so; and therefore was very angry that it was not so. Because *Elisba's* Method did not answer the Idea which *Naaman* had preconceived; therefore all was wrong, and the Patient would by no means accept the Conditions of the Cure. And Thus it very often happens among Others in such, or the like, Circumstances; who think they have an undoubted Right to prescribe to their Physicians, command their Governors, and teach their Instructors. Especially as to the last; Every body, it seems, has an Authority not only to Censure, but to Teach, the Ministers of Christ. Those who pretend to instruct No body else, think themselves abundantly qualified to instruct *Us*; for this good Reason, I suppose, because we have a Commission from God to instruct *Them*. And here I do not mean *only* Those who separate from our Church; but *Some* likewise of our own Communion: Who are always ready to tell us what Doctrines we should preach; and with much more Freedom, than Modesty, to pass their Censures upon us, for insisting upon such Subjects as they do not approve of. Especially if it happens to be That very Subject upon which I am

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Discourse now discoursing. We are told by Some, VI. that *it gives Offence*; and by Others, that it is *Meddling in Politicks*, and consequently not proper for the Pulpit. As to the Former; the *Offence* is Their Fault, not Ours: and we shall give but a miserable Account of the Discharge of our Function, if we are deterred from urging any necessary Truth of the Gospel, or endeavouring to convince Men of any Sin; because we are spitefully Condemned by malicious Enemies on the one hand, and gravely Blamed by injudicious Friends on the other. As to the Objection about *Meddling in Politicks*; any Thing almost of late comes under That Notion, when People do not care to hear of it. *Rebellion* and *Schism* in particular are supposed to have an especial Right to be skreened from our Attacks by That Expression. The First, it is confessed, is partly Political; but it is partly Moral, and Theological too: And upon This Bottom, they may say it is improper to preach against Murder, as well as against Rebellion: Rebellion, it is true, is partly of a Political Nature; and so is Murder. As for the other Instance I mentioned, which is *Schism*, That wholly relates to Ecclesiastical Matters; and our Censurers could not possibly have pitched upon any one
single

single Subject, which in a more particular Discourse and especial manner relates to our Office: VI. unless they will say that it is not the Business of a Physician to endeavour to cure an *obstinate* Patient; or that to bring back a Sheep which has strayed from the Fold, is foreign to the Employment of a Shepherd. But I shall say no more by way of direct Answer to These Objectors: And indeed, by at all *arguing* with them upon This Head, we give them much more than they deserve, or have any right to demand. And we should do them Justice; should we, without alledging any *Reasons* for our Proceedings, only Expostulate with them Thus: How come *They* to be so wise, as to understand the Nature of *our Office*, better than *we our selves*? In all other Professions, Those who have made it their Study to be skilled in them, are supposed to understand them best; And if there be any Difference, as indeed there is, *our Profession*, above all others, has a more especial Claim to This Privilege; because, besides our Education, and the constant Bent of our Studies, we have moreover the Authority, and particular Designation, of God; which no other Profession upon Earth can pretend to. And I must beg leave to say, that it

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VI.



Luke x.
16.

were greatly to be wished all Persons whatsoever would seriously and frequently consider Those plain Words of our Blessed Saviour to his Apostles, from whom our Authority is derived; *He that despiseth You, despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me, despiseth Him that sent me.* But to return.

Some Persons, who yet call themselves Christians, not only find fault with the Methods proposed by the *Ministers* of God; but go much higher, and quarrel even with Those that are prescribed by *God Himself*, with the Means of Grace, and the immediate Terms of Salvation. They do not understand *the Reason* why several Things relating both to Faith and Practice, are commanded in the Holy Scriptures. Thus to call God to an Account, and demand a Reason of His Proceedings, is so impious, as well as absurd, that I need not insist upon it here; especially, since I have taken some notice of it in another Discourse. My Business at present is with Persons of a Character somewhat different; who, though they have more Religion than the Former, and will not openly dispute any Point directly delivered in the Holy Scriptures, are yet very apt to find fault with the Decisions of their Superiors, espe-

especially in smaller Matters, and more Discourse particularly in Modes and Ceremonies, VI. of the Things enjoined. They think

The seare Circumstances of little or no Moment; They are only Adjuncts and Appendixes of something greater; They are Things indifferent, and so Every body is at Liberty to say, or do, what he pleases with relation to them: Never considering that *Ha nuga* (as They think them) *seria ducunt in mala*; that a little Thing may, in This Sense, involve a great one; that in Matters which of Themselves are indifferent, the Authority of Governors, and even of God Himself, may be struck at; because they cease to be indifferent, when they are lawfully commanded; and though the First may be little and inconsiderable, the Last is very far from being so. What *Naaman* objected about, was purely a Ceremony: Only he differed from our Dissenters in This, that He was for more Ceremony than was prescribed, and They are for less.

Here it is impossible not to observe, that What he *proposed* was a Ceremony, as well as That which he *disapproved of*; the Prophet's *striking his Hand over the Place* being as much a Mode or Circumstance, as the Leper's *dipping himself in Jordan*.

Discourse Jordan.

VI. And so it will ever be found to be; it must be so, and cannot be otherwise. Those who quarrel at one Sett of Ceremonies in the publick Worship of God, must substitute another in its room, if they intend to have any publick Worship at all; unless they have found out a way to strip Things of all Accidents, Modes, and Circumstances.

But as That Art is not yet invented, as our Separatists are forced to use, and actually do use, some Ceremonies, as well as We; it is in the mean time very hard to say why Our Modes of Divine Service are not altogether as innocent, as theirs; why a long, white, Linen Garment should not be as inoffensive, as a short, black, Woollen one; why Kneeling at our Devotions is not at least as proper as Sitting; and why the Praises of God are not as emphatically expressed by good Instrumental Musick, as by bad Vocal.

I have hitherto put it at the lowest; and, for the greater Strength of the Argument, supposed the Cases to be no more than equal. In the real Truth of the Matter, our Manner of Worship is solemn, decent, and edifying; suitable to the Awfulness of Religion, and tending to the Increase of Devotion: Theirs,
on

on the contrary, is indecent, rude, in-devout, disrespectful to God, and offensive to Men: Offensive, I say, and that too upon very just Grounds; unless we are to suppose that Civility and Humanity are not to be joined with Religion, or that good Manners are inconsistent with a good Conscience. But, as I said, to put it at the lowest, and imagine the Cases to be in other respects no more than barely equal; there is however This difference, that Our Manner of Worship is commanded by Authority, and Theirs is set up in direct Contradiction to it. And how an Obedience to That Authority should render Our Way unlawful, and an Opposition to it should make Theirs so holy and so godly, exceeds the Measures of human Understanding to conceive or imagine.

Thus far then the Cases of *Naaman* and our Sectaries are the same, as they both relate to Modes and Ceremonies: But they differ in This, that, considering the Circumstances, *He* was much less blameable than *They*. Besides his high Quality, and the Dignity of his Station; He was no *Jew*, but an ignorant *uninstructed Heathen*: *Elisba* had no *Authority* to give *Laws* to him, and pretended to none but That of an *Instructor* or *Prescriber*;

Discourser; His Case was wholly of a *private*

VI.

Nature; and he would have made no *Schism*, had he continued irreclaimably Obstinate: Yet, as it was, he was very much to be blamed; and had he not reformed, he would have been inexcusable. God Almighty grant, that Those who make up the other Branch of the Comparison, as they outdoe him in Guilt, may imitate him in his Amendment. For at present they are certainly in a very bad way; as will appear, if we consider further,

IV. That the Principle of such a Behaviour to our Superiors and Directors, is upon all Accounts utterly unjustifiable. Which was the Fourth General Head I proposed to speak to. Unjustifiable it is in These three Particulars; as it is *Absurd*, with respect to Reason; *Foolish*, with respect to Prudence; and *Wicked*, with respect to Religion.

According to This Principle, Nature is inverted, The Superior is in the lower Class, and the Inferior is above Him: Or rather, and more properly, there is no such Thing at all as Governing or being Governed, Teaching or being Taught, Directing or being Directed. Those who have made it their Business to inform them-

themselves and instruct others in such ^{Discourse} or such Particulars, must be supposed to ^{VI.} understand them best; and that without any Pretence to a Popish Infallibility. Others in many Instances must take Their Word, and proceed upon Their Authority; and this without the least Impeachment of their Own Liberty, or the Freedom either of their Wills or Understandings. When they have no other way of being informed, they can never act more rationally, and therefore more freely, than by acting according to the Advice of Those whose Business it is to understand the Thing in question. But of This I have particularly treated in a *Disc.* I. nother Discourse; and therefore shall say no more of it at present.

And to proceed otherwise is as *Imprudent*, as it is *Absurd*; and as *Wicked*, as it is *Either*. Can any thing be more contrary to our Happiness, than to refuse the Instruction of Those who have both Skill and Authority to direct us? No less contrary is it to the Word of God, and to That express Precept of the Apostle; *Obey Heb. xiii. them that have the Rule over you, and submit your selves.* And This is particularly applicable to the Duty of Church-Communion, and the Sin of Schism, which I am now chiefly considering; because it wholly

Discourse wholly relates to Ecclesiastical Things
 VI. and Persons. As it appears from the
 Words immediately following; *For they
 watch for your Souls; as they that must
 give Account, that they may do it with Joy,
 and not with Grief.* But Pride, and its
 genuine Offspring, Obstinacy and Self-
 Will, Singularity, and the Spirit of Con-
 tradiction, are the chief Sources of
 Schisms, or causeless Separations. The
 Principle, though not the Act, of Diso-
 bedience is the same, whether it relates
 to the Church, or to the State: Only it
 discovers itself by different Symptoms, by
 Schisms in the One, and by Seditions or
 Rebellion in the other. But it is always
 found, as relating to Both, in the same
 factious, turbulent, and unquiet Tem-
 pers; which are never satisfied with any
 Establishment, and never obedient to a-
 ny Authority.

Some indeed there are who involve
 themselves in the Guilt of causing or en-
 couraging Divisions, merely out of Cu-
 riosity, and the vain Levity and Un-
 certainty of their Tempers. They will
 oppose the Authority of God Himself:
 rather than not gratify their Fancies,
 and That Itch of Novelty which possesses
 them.

But

But they tell us they have Reasons for their Separation: And *Better Edification* is one which they much insist upon. To which I answer, 1st. That they may fancy themselves to be better edified; and yet at the same time be very far from it. They may be pleased with the Chiming of Words ill put together; They may imagine they see much Piety in Another, or feel much Comfort in Themselves; and all this while there may be no such Thing as Edification: They may neither be instructed in any one Doctrine of Religion, nor excited to the Practice of any one Vertue. But supposing they were *edified*; yet why so much *better* in a Conventicle, than in a Church? Do Their Teachers so very much excel Ours, in their liberal Education, and profound Learning? I think we may with great Modesty affirm, that they do not *very much* excel us: And as for what they boast concerning *Spiritual Gifts*; if they mean supernatural ones, they must excuse us from believing they have any, unless they will work some Miracle to convince us. If they mean the ordinary Gifts of God's Holy Spirit; they have certainly never the more of them for their Boasting, nor we ever the less for our Silence. Why therefore should Their Congregations

Discourse
 VI. tions be better instructed than Ours? And
 Those who think they are better *edified* when they are not better *instructed*, are under the strongest Delusion imaginable, and mistake the Wildness of their own Imaginations, for the Suggestions of God's Holy Spirit.

But setting aside all This, to state the Case with exact Truth, such Persons are so far from being *better* edified by their Separation, that they are not edified at all; because That Separation itself is unlawful. Edification, as it relates to particular Persons, is an Improvement in Grace and Goodness. And can we improve in Goodness by committing a Sin?

Rom. vi. Or *continue in Sin that Grace may abound?*

I.

What is This, at best, but *doing Evil that Good may come?* And of Those who do so, what does the Apostle pronounce?

Rom. iii. Even no less than This, *That their Damnation is just.*

It is furthermore necessary to be observed, That *Edification* in one, and that it's most proper Sense, as the Word is most commonly used in the Holy Scriptures, relates not to particular Persons, but to a whole Community. In its literal Sense it signifies *Building up*; and is metaphorically applied to the Union of the Members of Christ's Church, and the

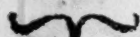
Improve

Improvement they receive from mutual Discourse
Harmony and Agreement. And who- VI.
soever shall affirm that a Separation from
the Established Church tends to Edifica-
tion in This Sense, must at the same time
assert that the true Art of Building con-
sists, not (as it is commonly imagined)
in uniting the Stones and other Materials,
but in separating and disjoining them
from each other.

Scandal, or giving Offence, is a Second
Objection against us: And This proceeds
from nothing, but their not having Skill
enough to understand the Meaning of
the Word. *Being offended*, in This Sense,
as it is used in the Holy Scriptures, does
not signify having a Dislike, or being
disgusted at a Thing; but it signifies (so
far as it concerns our present Purpose) a
weak, injudicious Person's being drawn
into Sin by the Example of Another, up-
on whose Authority he depends, when
the Person giving the Offence may law-
fully abstain from That Action, it being
to him indifferent: As in the Case of
Meats offered to Idols, stated by St. Paul.
But what is This to the Case now before
us; in which a Man cuts himself off from
the Communion of the Church, for fear,
as he pretends, of giving Offence? Obe-
dience to Authority, and the Preservation

Discourse

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of the Unity of the Church are no indifferent Things: but it is a grievous Sin to disobey the one, and break the other. In the Case therefore stated by the Apostle, a Man is obliged to abstain from a Thing indifferent, if there be a Danger of giving Offence by his not abstaining from it; Here he commits a great Sin, for fear, as he says, of the same Inconvenience; that is to say, he wounds his Own Conscience, lest another Man should wound His. Besides, how is it possible that any Constitution upon Earth should subsist, either in Church, or State, if the Laws must be altered not only upon the pretended, but even upon the real, silly Doubts and Scruples of the most foolish and injudicious? Nay, how does it appear, but that we should give at least as much Offence by altering, as by retaining? Of which I shall have occasion to speak a little more particularly, before I conclude. All the weak Brethren, it is to be presumed, are not of Their side: And so This Argument, if it proved any thing, would prove full as strongly for us, as against us.

The next Objection, which has an Affinity with the preceding, is taken from *weak, tender, and scrupulous Consciences.*
How

How much, and how long, soever These Discourse
Words have amused the World; it is VI.
plain, that Now, at least, they do not
affect the present Case. For since Those
with whom I am arguing, acknowledge
our Communion to be lawful; how can
their Consciences hinder them from com-
plying with it? Do their scrupulous
Consciences tell them that in Things
lawful it is unlawful to obey Those
whom God has commanded us to obey?
If They do; the Dispute is over: If
That be to be asserted, there is an end
of Human Reason. But the Truth of
the Matter is, as I have often said, they
commit a grievous Sin by their Separation:
We again and again insist upon it,
that if it be lawful to communicate, it
is unlawful to separate; because to disobey
Authority without Reason, and without Reason
to divide from the Church, is to break the Bond
of Unity, to rend the Mystical Body of Christ,
to weaken Christian Love and Concord,
to cause endless Quarrels and Contentions,
and to contravene the Precepts of the Apostle;
Who says, *Now I beseech you, Rom. xvi. Brethren,
mark them which cause Divisions,¹⁷ and Offences,
contrary to the Doctrine which ye have received;
and avoid them. Now I Cor. i. I beseech you, Brethren,
by the Name of¹⁰.*

Discourse *our Lord Jesus Christ, that there be no*

VI. *Divisions among you.* No Divisions, or
 ~~~~~ no Schisms; for Schisms, *σχίσματα*, is the  
 1 Cor. iii. Word in the Original. *Whereas there are*  
 3. *among you Strife and Divisions; are ye not*  
*Carnal?* What then is to be said about  
 the tender Consciences of Those who se-  
 parate from an Established Church, with  
 which they own Communion to be law-  
 ful? Their Consciences are so very ten-  
 der, that they make them commit a Sin;  
 Such Consciences are like some Stomachs,  
 which refuse wholesome Food, and can  
 digest none but that which is hurtful  
 and pernicious. Do These tender Con-  
 sciences of Theirs teach them to *cause*  
*Divisions* contrary to the express Word of  
 God, to rend and divide the Church,  
 and be the Occasion of so much Uncha-  
 ritableness and Contention? What an un-  
 accountable sort of Tenderneſs is This?  
 But that I have no Intention to provoke  
 them, unless we must be said to do it  
 by the Arguments necessarily made use  
 of to display the Sinfulness and Unjusti-  
 fiableness of their Schism; I say, were  
 it not for That, I could easily produce  
 Instances more than enough, by which  
 they have shewn upon many Occasions,  
 that how *weak* soever their Consciences  
 may be, they are not so extremely tender.

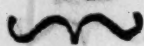
Some

Some there are who object against our Discourse  
external Worship; telling us, that *the* VI.  
*Heart is all*, and that God is to be Wor-  
*shipped in Spirit* only. This I deny: The  
Heart is not all; It is the *main* Thing, if  
they please, but not the *only* Thing.  
God is to be *Worshipped in Spirit*, chiefly  
indeed, but not *only*: There is an inward  
Devotion, but there ought to be an out-  
ward one too; and we are to glorify  
God in our *Body*, as well as our *Spirit*, 1 Cor. vi.  
both *which are God's*. Indeed, if they<sup>20.</sup>  
mean that the Heart is the only Princi-  
ple or Fountain of Action, by which  
all outward Performances are to be esti-  
mated according to the formal Good or  
Evil of them; I readily grant it: And  
if in This Sense *their Hearts were right*;  
we should hear very little, or nothing,  
of These and such like Objections.

The generality, if not all, of our Se-  
paratists, who pretend to argue the Case,  
do Now, as I before observed, acknow-  
ledge Communion with our Church to be  
lawful; and they attempt to defend  
their Separation by the Arguments above-  
mentioned: If there be any who main-  
tain the contrary, they endeavour to  
support their Opinion chiefly, if not sole-  
ly, upon These two Objections; That  
our way of Worship is *Superstitious*, and  
that



Discoursethat it is an *Infringement of our Christian*  
 VI. *Liberty.*



But the First of These Cavils; Those, who make it, labour under the Misfortune I before took notice of; which is, that they do not understand their own Words. *Superstition* consists in a causeless Fear, or Scrupulosity, making That unlawful on the One Side, or necessary on the Other, which God never made so. And is the Imposition of our Ceremonies any Thing like This? How are They that impose them guilty of *Superstition*? They do not pretend that These Ceremonies are in themselves Things necessary; Obedience to Government in Things lawful, is indeed necessary; but it is *God* that makes it so, not *We*. On the contrary, to raise so many foolish Doubts, Scruples, and Difficulties about the Lawfulness of These Things, nay to pronounce them absolutely unlawful, without the least Foundation of Reason or Scripture, is *Superstition* in the strictest Sense; and Those who do so, are grossly *Superstitious*, according to the Use of That Word in the Writings of the best Divines. So that our Adversaries might well have spared This Objection; since it does not at all affect Those against whom it is urged; but is of very great

great Force, when it is applied to Them-  
selves.

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As to the other Cavil, about Christian Liberty; Our Blessed Saviour freed us from the Yoke of the *Mosaick* Ceremonial Law: And in the Privilege of That Exemption Christian Liberty consists, so far as it is concerned in the present Objection. Now do These Sectaries of ours really and *bonâ fide* believe, that the Use of our Ceremonies is a Restoration of the Ceremonial Law? And that we persuade them so far to turn *Jews*, when we persuade them to communicate with the Church? When the Apostle commands the *Galatians* to *stand fast in the Li-* Gal. v. 1:  
*berty wherewith Christ has made us free;* He plainly means, as appears from the whole Tenor of his Discourse, and his Design of Writing That Epistle, that they should not re-intangle themselves with the *Jewish* Rites, so as to think themselves still obliged to the Observation of them, as Those Judaizing Converts zealously contended they were. But when *St. Paul* commands us to assert This Liberty, and be free from the *Jewish* Rites; does he thereby command us to be free from the Observance of all human Laws? Does Christian Liberty consist in This? Or rather can there be a greater Scandal

Discourse to the Christian Religion, than to say  
 VI. so?

~~~~~ All their Arguments and Objections therefore are frivolous, and of no Moment: And if These People would but hear Reason, their Schism would soon be at an end. In the mean time, their refusing to hear Instruction, and presuming to set up their own Authority in opposition to That of the Church, is (as I have fully shewn) upon all Accounts utterly unjustifiable. Let them at last therefore submit to the Church; for there is no reason to expect the Church should submit to Them. As will appear from my Fifth General Head; in which I proposed to shew,

V. That it is most irrational to think that Those who are Directors should submit and yield the Point, and alter their Method of Proceeding, in compliance with the Dictates of Those who so unreasonably refuse to be directed. It is necessary to say a few Words upon This Head; because our Sectaries take it very ill that the Church does not make all the Changes they desire, and new model itself according to Their Scheme, and to gratify Their Humours. To shew how modest and equitable a Demand This is, I have

I have only These few Considerations to offer; That such a Proceeding is contrary, 1. To the Nature of Things. 2. To the Dignity and Honour of Government. 3. To the Satisfaction even of particular Persons. And 4. To the very Being of any Constitution whatsoever.

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VI.
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The First necessarily follows from what was touched upon in the foregoing General Head. If Teachers are to submit their Judgments, and determine their Actions, according to the Opinion or Demands of Those whom it is their Business to teach; if Physicians are to prescribe according to the Prescriptions of their Patients; and Governors to be obedient to their Subjects: Then First Principles are confounded; and it is to no purpose either to Talk, or Think. If This be not contrary to Nature; what can be said to be so?

2. Is is contrary to the Honour and Dignity of Government. And This, we must observe, is a very material Point. For though private Persons are not bound to insist upon their Honour in Matters of Controversy or Dispute, (bound, I say, for they may very lawfully do it, if they please;) yet in publick Affairs, in Matters of Government, it is not only lawful, but necessary, for Those who are entrusted

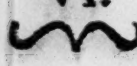
Discourse trusted with Power, to assert and maintain the Dignity of it. For if once the Awe and Reverence of Government be lost; Government itself will be very weak and precarious. To apply This therefore to the present Case between our Church and Those who refuse Communion with her: It is manifestly contrary to all Reason and Justice, that an Established Constitution, confirmed by the Laws of God and Man, should yield and bend backwards and forwards not only to the Caprice and Humour, but even to the real Scruples and Weakness, of a few particular Persons. Did the Case affect the State, as it does the Church; I am sure there would be no Question about it: And there is exactly the same Reason, with regard to the Church, as to the State. And This will hold good, even when the Objections are really well grounded; because it may be more prudent and safe to bear some real Inconveniencies, than to make Alterations: How much more, when the Exceptions taken are so idle and foolish, as Those which I have been now examining! But farther;

3. For the Church to comply with the Separatists, is contrary to the very End which They themselves propose; I mean, the

the Satisfaction even of particular Per- Discourse
sons. The very Nature of such a Com- VI.
pliance renders it impracticable. It may

satisfy Some, 'tis true; but will it not
dissatisfy as Many? Nay, will it not
dissatisfy very Many more than it will
satisfy? When will the Dissenters Them-
selves, of all Kinds and Denominations,
agree in one uniform Scheme of De-
mands, and tell us what they would
have? Or suppose That were done; yet
since all their Exceptions against our
Church proceed (as we have shewn) not
from Reason, but either from Ignorance,
or Obstinacy; and since in *Them* Those
Qualities are not like to be cured by such
a Compliance in *Us*: There is Reason to
fear that the Separation would not be
lessened by it; but that they would as
much be given to Wrangling *Then*, as they
are *Now*. For, as I observed in its pro-
per Place, *Some* Ceremonies and Modes
of Worship we must have, if we discard
These; and the same Persons who object
against *These*, may as well object against
Any. This therefore is not a likely Me-
thod to bring them off from their Schism:
And if we speak only of pleasing them,
will there not be danger of disobliging our
own Members, as well as hopes of obli-
ging Those who are not so? And whom
ought

Discourse ought we to be most careful to oblige?

VI.  The greater Number, or the less? Those who already Communicate with us, or Those who might do so, if they were Thus complied with, and very likely would not? Those who were always Dutiful and Affectionate to our Church, or Those whose constant Behaviour to Her is not so very obliging? But 'tis endless to talk of These Things; endless for a Constitution to make Changes and Alterations, in Condescension to the Humours of particular Persons. It is (as I have shewn) the Duty of Those particular Persons to comply with the Establishment: but for the Establishment to comply with Them is absurd in its Nature, and pernicious in its Consequences. Nay, as I observed,

4. It strikes at the very Being of any Constitution whatsoever. For suppose One Sett of Demands were granted; where would Demanding stop? Should we part with our Ceremonies; I doubt our Liturgy would be in Danger: And if That were gone; I believe our Episcopacy would not be so safe, as it is now. Will not one Concession draw on another, till at last the Whole Establishment is granted away? Or at least, as it was hinted in the preceding Particular,

cular, it would subject the Establishment Discourse
to perpetual Changes, contrary to the VI.
End of all Constitutions, and render it lit-
tle better than no Constitution at all.

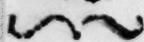
I proceed now to the Sixth and Last
Observation, raised from the Words of
the Text; viz.

VI. That such Persons, as I have been
speaking of, ought to take kindly the Ad-
monitions of their Advisers; and, in com-
pliance with them, to reform That Fault
which was always unjustifiable, and, if
persisted in after such Admonition, must
be inexcusable.

Naaman's Advisers were his Servants;
and yet he took in good part the Admo-
nition they gave him, and acted in pur-
suance of it. The Reason will hold
stronger between Us, and Those who se-
parate from us: Our Ministers have Au-
thority in the highest Sense to speak These
Truths; and that they should become
These Mens Enemies, for telling the
Truth, is a Thing altogether unreason-
able. Indeed all true Members of the
Church, not its Ministers only, are, *as*
such, Superior to Schismatics; because
they have Truth and the Constitution on
their Side, and may justly assume a kind
of Authority in advising them. They
ought

Discourse

VI.



ought not indeed to do it with ill Manners, or ill Nature; with intemperate Heat or Passion; but with the sincerest Kindness and Charity for their Persons; though with Zeal and Earnestness against their Tenets and Practices. But here it must be observed, that We (of the Clergy especially) are very falsely represented in This Particular. I know not how it happens that We, and Those who separate from our Church, stand upon a strangely different Bottom in Point of our Behaviour to one another; and They have an unaccountable Privilege over Us in That Respect. In Us, to reason with them, to display the Weakness of their Arguments, and the Unjustifiableness of their Schism, is Rage and Fury: In Them, to discharge the most venomous Slander, and the most Unchristian Malice, is Temper and Moderation. What should be the Reason of This Difference? If there were really any, one would think the Advantage should be rather on our Side; because We are of the Constitution, and They of the Indulgence only. But instead of That, they are not content to be upon the Level with us, which is more than it becomes them to pretend to; but carry it with a superior Air, seem to usurp a kind of Authority over us, vilify our

Doctrines,

Doctrines, our Discipline, and our Per-
sons, and treat us with Insolence upon
any Occasion. One would imagine, I
say, that were we really hot, and furious,
as it is falsely alledged, we might be in
some measure excused, though not justi-
fied; since we have sufficient Provocation
given us, and it is the Constitution we
are defending; They, on the other hand,
defend nothing but their own Opinions:
It is by Those of our Communion that
they are tolerated, and exempted from
Penalties; and therefore, even if Their
Way were right, and Ours wrong, it
would become them to behave them-
selves with Modesty and Reserve. But in
Fact, as I said, it is quite otherwise; in
Us, who are Members of the Established
Church, Arguing is Railing; in Them,
who oppose it, Railing is Meekness: So
unhallowed a Thing, it seems, is our
Church, that it turns Vertue into Vice;
so sanctifying a Thing is Schism, that it
turns Vice into Vertue: So peculiar a
Privilege has Toleration, above Consti-
tution!

These Things are really so provoking;
that some Heat on our Part might be
excusable. But, after all, what Heat do
we shew? What, I mean, that is crimi-
nal or unjustifiable? 'Tis likely we may
express,

VI.
~

Discourse

VI.



express, and deliver, our Thoughts with Vehemence or Earnestness; which was never condemned in any Nation, but our own. Some Poignancy of Expression may, and must, be mixed with Discourses of This Nature; and it is no more than what is proper to engage the Attention. Nay, if Sharpness, and Severity too, be not sometimes allowable; the Examples of the Apostles, especially of *St. Paul*, nay of our Saviour Himself, ought not to be imitated by us.

It were extremely to be wished, that we could rectify People's Mistakes in the strange Use of their Words; and make them mean something by what they say: And though we may not immediately succeed in an Attempt, we ought not for that reason to discontinue it. They may please to understand then, that Things of This Nature lose half their Efficacy; if they are delivered in a cold, unaffecting, sleepy manner; which is contrary to true Sense, and true Sincerity. But it is no Wonder that These Words should be misapplied, as well as many others; and that honest Zeal and Earnestness should pass for Rage and Fury, as well as Stupidity for Meekness, and Treachery for Prudence. There is indeed so much Malice in Some, and so much Ignorance in Others, that

it

it is well the Ministers of Christ are Discourse
commanded by the Apostle, *to reprove, VI.*
rebuke, and exhort with all Long-suffering, *2 Tim. iv.*
as well as *Authority and Doctrine*; there^{1.}
being Matter sufficient to exercise their *Tit. ii. 15.*
Patience. For though they are dedicated
to a Sacred Office, they pretend to be no
more than Men, Men of like Passions with *Acts xiv.*
Others, and equally beset with all Those^{15.}
Infirmities, to which the common Nature
of corrupt Mankind is obnoxious.

But it was ever so, and will never be
otherwise: Truth is always troublesome
to Those who are in fault; and their only
way to be easy, is to receive the former,
and renounce the latter. It is apt to be
troublesome to them, especially in Mat-
ters relating to Divinity and Religion. *The Heb. iv.*
Word of God is quick and powerful, sharper *12.*
than a two-edged Sword, piercing deep, and
searching to the very bottom of the Soul.
After St. Stephen had finished his Dis-
course to the Jews; the Sacred Writer
tells us, that *when they heard those things, Acts vii.*
they were cut to the Heart; an infallible^{54.}
Proof that Those Things were true: At
the same time they *gnashed upon him Ibid.*
with their Teeth; and answered him with
Stones instead of Reasons. God be prai-
sed, We are Now in no Danger of such
Treatment as That; and may the same

Discourse good and merciful God grant to Those
 VI. whom I have now been endeavouring to
 convince, that their Hearts may be as
 free from such Hardness and Obstinacy,
 as their Hands are from such unnatural
 Violence. What I have said upon This
 Subject is likewise true; true (as it has
 been fully proved) even to the Evidence
 of a Demonstration. And yet they can-
 not be content to be unmolested *Them-*
selves; but are always troubling and mo-
 lesting *Us*. There is a certain Baseness of
 Temper in the *Ishmael* Offspring, to which
 the Noble and Generous Spirit of the *true*
Heir is an utter Stranger. And as of
Gal. iv. old *He* that was born after the *Flesh*, per-
 29. secuted him that was born after the *Spirit*,
 or, (as it is expressed *Gen. xvi.*) *mocked*
him; *i. e.* abused, affronted, and insult-
Ver. 30. ed him; even so it is now. Nevertheless,
 what saith the Scripture? *Cast out the Bond*
Woman, and her Son; for the *Son of the*
Bond Woman shall not be Heir with the
Son of the Free Woman. Do we then cast
 them out, so as to reject and abandon
 them? God forbid: So far from it, that
 we invite and intreat them to incorpo-
 rate themselves into the Family; that
 We may all live and love as Brethren.
 I only mean, that while they continue in
 their Schism, they ought not to think of
 being

being upon an equal foot, or to be Heirs Discourse VI.
 with the true Members of the Church; though they have the Confidence to expect That; nay more, even to be Superior to us, and Rulers over us. A Confidence, 'tis true, as vain as it is presumptuous. But however, what else can they mean by talking of being Persecuted *Themselves*, only because it is no longer in their Power to Persecute *Us*? For That they never yet failed to do, whenever they were able: An Exemption from Penalties they enjoy, now they are out of Power; but never granted one, when they were in it. These Things are so notorious; that 'tis amazing they will by their unreasonable Clamours force us to mention That which can tend to nothing but their own Shame, and Self-Condernation. But such an *Exemption* now will not satisfy *Them*; Power and Authority is the Thing they aim at; an Absurdity unheard of in any Nation but our own, that Those should pretend to have a Share in the Government, who are not a part of the Establishment.

* With just as much Reason and Modesty have they presumed to erect Se-

* N. B. This was written, and preached, long before the Act to prevent the Growth of Schism.

Discourse

VI.



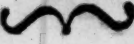
minaries, to Propagate, and Perpetuate, their Schism; expressly contrary to the Laws, and to the common Sense and Reason of Mankind. Is This consistent with the Pretence of scrupulous Consciences? Let it be supposed that All who Now separate from the Church do it upon That Principle; That certainly relates only to the present Generation, to Those who are actually entangled in such Prejudices. But is a Man born with a scrupulous Conscience? Or if he be; ought his Scruples to be Cultivated, instead of being Removed? Ought he to be nurtured in them by Learning, and Discipline? Never sure were Arts and Sciences applied to such a Purpose before. That Men should be Schooled into Weakness of Understanding, and Tutored and Educated into Doubts and Difficulties; that they should establish Nurseries of Prejudices, and Universities of scrupulous Consciences; is a Thing so astonishing, that Posterity will never believe it, unless they are convinced of it (as we presume to hope they will not) by the unaccountable Continuance of so shocking an Absurdity. But the Truth of the Thing is, They do but put the Matter upon This Issue, upon the bottom of scrupulous Consciences: No; They think, and insist upon it, that
their

their own Way is best, and so are for being Established as well as We; for a Constitution within a Constitution; 'till the New one shall have justled out the Old one. *At present* they think there is but little Difference between Their Exemption and Our Establishment; and indeed, as Matters are managed by them, there is not *very much*.

But be That as it will: Though human Laws exempt them from Penalties; yet, if Schism be in itself Evil and Sinful, as I have proved it to be, so it still continues, notwithstanding such an Exemption; which may indeed indemnify their Bodies, or Estates, but cannot reach their Souls. Let them then at last hearken to Reason; imitate the Example of *Naaman*, conform to the Institutions of their lawful Directors, and *wash and be clean*. Nor let them by vain Dreams of extraordinary Purity imagine that they have no Need of Washing: I have sufficiently proved the contrary; The *Leprosy of Schism* is no inconsiderable Disease: They cannot have it cured by any Method but That which we prescribe; nor are their *Abana* and *Parphar* to be compared to our *Jordan*. Not only the Sufficiency of Our Ministry, but the Insufficiency and Nullity of Theirs has

23

been

Discourse
 VI.  been proved to a Demonstration; so that by adhering to an invalid Authority, or rather to no Authority at all, they cut themselves off from the Church of Christ. Or even if they did not do it That way, if the Mission of their Ministers were never so Authentick; yet the Guilt of Schism, by causelessly refusing Communion with the Church, and forming themselves into separate Congregations, would nevertheless remain upon them.

May they all, like *Naaman*, be persuaded out of an Error, and *wash in the Waters* prescribed them; that, in a spiritual Sense, *their Flesh may come again to them like the Flesh of a little Child*; that they may, like *New-born Babes*, desire the sincere Milk of the Word, that they may grow thereby.

2 Kings

v. 15.

1 Pet. ii. 2.

And though we are now forced, in order to convince them, to deal fairly and freely with them, and consequently to give them some Uneasiness by mentioning Things which we would avoid, were it possible; (as He must be a skillful Operator indeed, who can probe an inveterate Wound to the bottom, without giving the Patient some Pain;) yet when they shall have entered into the Communion of the Church, which always with open Arms stands ready to receive and embrace

brace them ; This Task, so unpleasant Discourse
both to Us, and Them, will then be en- VI.
tirely at an end. For though we are 
now forced to *reprove*; we will then never
upbraid. All the Troubles and Confusions
in which thy have often involved These
unhappy Nations, shall, as much as pos-
sible, be forgotten : All the long Account
of the many Affronts, Injuries, and Per-
secutions, which we have received from
them, shall, as far as it is practicable, be
cancelled and abolished. Nothing but
Love, and Kindness, Uniformity, and
Universal Charity, shall then be heard
of among us. Happy Times, and happy
Those who live to see them ! But then
we must remember, that the only way
to procure This Blessing, is to pursue the
Method I have proposed ; for *Them* to
submit to the *Church*, not to expect that
the *Church* should submit to *Them* : Nor,
by an impracticable *Latitude*, or *Compre-*
hension, to embroil us more, instead of
uniting us. This would be to *confound*
us, by *joining*, more than by *separating* ;
to jumble together an indigested Heap
of Contrarieties into the same Mass ;
and to make the *Old Chaos* the Plan
of a *New Reformation*. That which I
proposed is the plain, the only true Me-
thod : I have done my Endeavour to make

Discourse it succeed; Whether it does, or not, we

VI. know the Command of the Holy Ghost
 to his Prophet; which is to speak to his

Ezek. ii. 7. People, *whether they will hear, or whether*
they will forbear. And under the melan-

choly Reflection that others do not Their
 Duty, nothing can so effectually support
 us, as the comfortable Consideration of
 having faithfully and sincerely discharged
 our Own.



The Peculiar ADVANTAGES
of the **CHRISTIAN DISPENSA-**
TION; and the *dreadful Guilt*
and *Punishment* of Those who
Slight, or Abuse them.

HEBREWS ii. 3.

*How shall we escape, if we neglect so great
Salvation?*

TO be *Delivered, or Redeemed, from* Discourse
any kind of Slavery, or Misery, is **VII.**
a Thing so very desirable; that one would
imagine None who have been blessed with
it, should want to be reminded of it.
Yet such is the Degeneracy of Mankind,
that how necessarily so ever All Men
desire Happiness; Few can be persuaded
to set a just Value upon the Privileges
and Advantages they enjoy. This In-
gratitude, among a thousand other Cor-
ruptions, is deeply rooted in our depraved
Nature; so that we are always apt to
slight

Discourse VII. slight and overlook what we are in Possession of, though we never so little deserve it. And This Observation holds good in Temporals, as well as in Spirituals; Of the *First* indeed we are more than enough *desirous*, when we *have them not*; and too little of the *Last*. But we are too much inclined to neglect *Both*, when we are actually possessed of them; especially the *Last*: Because for Them we have the least Concern, though we ought to have the greatest. Man is Redeemed: and nothing is more difficult than to make him sensible that he is so. Or if any thing be more difficult; it is to convince him of the exceeding Danger he incurs by That Insensibility.

We are by Baptism freed from the *Imputation* of Original Sin; but the *Corruption* of it is still so predominant in us, that we cannot, without Pain and Reluctancy, think upon, or make use of, the invaluable Privileges which are purchased for us. Our old Enemies, the World, the Flesh, and the Devil, are strong and powerful, to blind our Eyes, darken our Understandings, captivate our Affections, and debauch all our Faculties: But still, God has performed all that could be done on His part; Redemption is certainly procured for us; but it is incumbent upon

upon Us to apply it to our selves; which we must do, by resisting and subduing our vicious Inclinations, by striving against Sin even unto Death, by truly valuing and esteeming the Advantages of the Gospel, and by considering, with the Apostle in my Text, *How we shall escape, if we neglect so great Salvation.* Discourse VII.

The Subject of This Epistle, or the main Design which the Author of it proposes, is to make a Comparison between the Two Dispensations of the Law and the Gospel; to shew the Weakness and Insufficiency of That, the Excellency and Perfection of This; and to prove that the One was never intended to be any more than a Type of the Other, an Introduction to it, and consequently to be done away and superseded by it. He therefore begins his Treatise, by setting forth the eminent Dignity of This last and greatest Dispensation.

God who at sundry Times, and in divers Manners, spake in time past unto the Fathers by the Prophets; hath in These last Days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed Heir of all Things, &c. And so goes on describing the Glory and Excellence of His Person, His Majesty and Power, His Godhead and Dominion, to the End of That Chapter. Then follows the

Discourse the Consequence drawn from it in the
VII. very next Words; at the Beginning of
 This Chapter, of which my Text is a
Ver. 1, 2, 3. Part. Therefore we ought to give the more
 earnest heed to the Things which we have
 heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.
 For if the Word spoken by Angels (*i. e.* the
 Law of Moses which was delivered by
 the Ministry of Angels) was steadfast; and
 every Transgression and Disobedience received
 a just Recompence of Reward: How shall We
 escape, if we neglect so great Salvation, which
 at the first began to be spoken by the Lord (*i. e.*
 by our Saviour Jesus Christ) and was con-
 firmed unto Us by Them that heard him?

In the Opening of the Text, I have
 already, and not without Design, hinted
 at Those Points which are to be the
 Heads of my ensuing Discourse. They
 are now to be drawn out distinctly and
 at length; and shall be more fully and
 particularly considered. The Words of
 the Text then involve These Three Pro-
 positions.

I. That the Salvation, purchased by
 our Saviour, is the greatest that can be
 imagined.

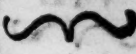
II. That This Salvation is not purcha-
 sed for us *Absolutely*; but that by our
 Negligence we may finally miss of it.
 And, III.

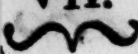
III. That Those who do so neglect it, ^{Discourse} are in a *worse Condition* than if it had never been offered, or tendered to them; ^{VII.} and are of all Mankind the most inexcusable.

I. We are First to consider, That the Salvation, purchased by our Saviour, is the greatest that can be imagined. It is so, whether we regard the *Evidence*, the *Dignity*, or the *Advantages*, of it. As to the First; The preternatural Works performed by Christ and his Disciples, are (as St. Luke expresses it) *so many infallible Proofs of the Truth of their Mission and Doctrine.* This the Apostle urges in the Words immediately following Those which I cited above, in which my Text is included; *How shall we escape, if we neglect so great Salvation? Which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard it: God also bearing them witness both with Signs and Wonders, and divers Miracles, and Gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own Will.* The Miracles wrought by Moses were indeed sufficient to give Testimony to His Authority, and to convince any unprejudiced Person: But Those of our Saviour, and His Apostles, were beyond Comparison more considerable, both for
Number,

Discourse Number, and Quality. Then the Clear-
VII. ness and Plainness of their Doctrines and
 Precepts is such, that (as the Prophet
Habak. speaks, upon another Occasion) *He that*
ii. 2. *runs may read them.* The Veil of Moses is
 taken off; the Shadows of the Law are
 scattered and dispelled by the glorious
 Light of the Gospel; and, upon the
 Whole, the *Evidence* of This Salvation is
 beyond all Controversy as great as pos-
 sible.

And so, in the next place, is its *Dig-
 nity.* And that whether we consider the
Doctrine revealed, or the *Person revealing.*
 The Doctrine is Spiritual, Pure, Noble,
 Sublime, Heavenly; not resting in ex-
 ternal Observances, but rectifying the
 Soul and Mind, and restoring *Reason* to
 its genuine Authority. For by the Fall of
 Man, and Original Sin, our little World
 was turned upside down; the Order of
 Things inverted; and the Superior Fa-
 culties brought in Bondage to the Infe-
 rior. Hence it is, that we find our Ani-
 mal and Sensible Life so strong and vi-
 gorous; but the Spiritual Powers over-
 whelmed, as it were, by a Heap of Rub-
 bish, by the Ruins of our Nature, feebly
 exerting itself by fits, and almost ex-
 tinct, and dead within us. Now the
 Doctrine of Christ repairs These Ruins,
 new-

new-creates This Chaos, and restores all Discourse
 Things to their primitive Order. Such VII.
 is the Dignity of the *Doctrine*: And as 
 for That of the *Teacher*, He is no less than
 the Eternal and Only-begotten Son of
 God; who is *the Brightness of his Fa-Heb. i. 2.*
ther's Glory, and the express Image of his
Person; and who is Himself over All,
 God Blessed for ever. Great must be the Rom. ix.
 Salvation which God Himself came from^s
 Heaven to reveal: And it will farther ap-
 pear so, if we consider the *Benefits* and
Advantages by which the Religion of
 Christ is distinguished from all others.
 Under the Law every wilful Transgression
 of it was punished without Mercy; un-
 der the Gospel we have the Privilege of
 Repentance, and Remission of Sins. And
 because we are of Our selves utterly un-
 able to please God, and perform the Con-
 ditions required of us; the Assistance of
 His Grace and Holy Spirit is never want-
 ing, if we sincerely do the best of our
 own Endeavours. And because Those
 must always be insufficient; we have the
 infinite Merits of a crucified Redeemer
 to supply all our Defects. These inesti-
 mable Advantages are proper and pecu-
 liar to the Evangelical Dispensation: For
it is not possible that the Blood of Bulls and of Heb. x. 4.
Goats should take away Sins; and by the Works Gal. ii. 16.
 of

Discourse of the Law shall no Flesh be justified. Then,
 VII.  to crown All, the Kingdom of Heaven,
 an eternal Weight of Glory, is the Reward
 of our Obedience: This is promised un-
 der no other Dispensation; but our Blef-
 sed Saviour only *hath brought Life and Im-*
mortality to Light through the Gospel. Thus
 Great is the Salvation which is purchased
 for us: But then,

2 Tim. i.
 10.

II. It is not purchased *Absolutely*; but
 we may by our Negligence finally miss
 of it: Which was the Second Thing I
 mentioned as Observable from the Text.
 Not that it needs much Proof; it being
 so very plain from the Holy Scriptures,
 as well as from the Reason and Nature
 of the Thing itself. Yet it is fit to be
 taken notice of; in Opposition to the Do-
 ctrine of Those, who are for a most com-
 pendious Scheme of Salvation indeed, a
 very easy way of going to Heaven. To
 believe thoroughly, and rely upon the
 Merits of Christ, is with Them the whole
 of Christianity: But This is a Mistake
 as gross, as it is dangerous. The Design
 of our Saviour's Coming into the World
 was not only to suffer for our Sins, and
 redeem us from the Punishment due to
 them; but also to establish a most excel-
 lent Religion, to teach us the Will of

his

his Heavenly Father, and engage us to Purity of Life, both by his Divine Precepts, and his own most Holy Example. Discourse VII.

And therefore it is a vain thing for Those to expect any Benefit from his *Death*, who will not endeavour to conform themselves to his *Life*. He came to save us not *in* our Sins, but *from* our Sins; from the Guilt, as well as the Punishment, of them. The Imputation of Original Transgression is already washed away only by his Blood: But our Tears must be joined with his Blood, to wash away the Guilt which our actual Sins have contracted; and before the Merits of his Passion can be applied to us, we must by true Repentance be qualified to receive them. This is to be observed by Those I mentioned, who wholly rely upon the Satisfaction of Christ, without any Endeavours of their own; and think it a Dishonour to him, and a Detracting from his Merits, to pretend to work out their own Salvation; as if (say they) his Death and Sufferings were not sufficient to do it without our Assistance. And Thus they have found out a new way of serving God, and going to Heaven, by doing nothing, or by doing ill; and of honouring our Lord by breaking his

Discourse

VII.

1 Tim. i.
15.

Commandments. It is indeed a faithful Saying, and worthy of all Acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the World to save Sinners: And from hence they would fain conclude that they may safely continue in their Wickedness; and that the greater Sinners they are, the more he is glorified by them. But what Sort of Sinners are They, whom Jesus Christ came into the World to save? Not obstinate, impenitent, and persevering ones: for against such the full Vials of Divine Wrath and Vengeance are poured out in almost every Page of the Holy Scriptures. But they are only the Returning, Penitent, and Reforming Sinners, who have any Right to the Merits of our Saviour's sufferings; and to Them alone is That faithful Saying to be applied. Nor is This any Detracting from the Sufficiency of his Merits; since they were never intended to save Any, but only Those who obey his Commandments, and do That which is pleasing in his Sight. But These Men, it seems, would have been more obliged to him, had he given them the Privilege of Sinning without being Punished, and of being Rewarded by God for Serving the Devil. But such Imaginations are as vain, and foolish, as they

they are impious and prophane. For *This Discourse*
purpose was the Son of God manifested, that VII.
he might destroy the Works of the Devil. *1 John iii.*
He gave himself for us, that he might re-
deem us from all Iniquity, and purify to him- Tit. ii.
self a peculiar People zealous of good Works. 14.

His great Design therefore was to make us Happy, by making us Holy; without which he could not have completed the wonderful Work of our Redemption. We may as well make both Ends of any other Contradiction meet, as reconcile God with Sin, or attain to Happiness without Holiness. Wherefore we must not imagine, that under the Gospel-Dispensation we have nothing to do, and that our Saviour has done all our Business for us: He has certainly procured Salvation for all Mankind, if they will accept of it; He has indeed redeemed us, and purchased Heaven for us; *i. e.* He has brought us out of a State of Enmity with God into such a Condition, that through his Merits and Satisfaction, and Faith in his Blood, we may be forever happy; if we perform the Conditions required of us, and obey all his Holy Laws and Commandments. But he has not saved us, so as to advance us to eternal Blessedness for doing nothing, or

Discourse for barely believing in him; as These
VII. Mens easy Systems have stated it. In
 short, He is the Saviour of the World,
 not by bringing us to Heaven without
 any Labour of our Own, but by making
 our Labour effectual to That Pur-
 pose; and by putting us not in a *Neces-*
sity, but in a *Capacity*, of Salvation: And
 strange it is, that Any body should think
 otherwise, who has ever opened the
 Scriptures; in which we are command-
 ed to *give Diligence to make our Calling*
and Election sure; and to work out our Sal-
vation with Fear and Trembling. Which
 we shall be the more incited to do, if
 we consider,

2 Pet. i.
 10.
 Phil. ii.
 12.

III. That Those who neglect it, are
 in a *worse Condition* than if it had never
 been offered or tendered to them; and
 are of all Mankind the most inexcusable.
 For the full Discussion of This Point, two
 Things are necessary.

1st, To shew, how many Ways Men
 may be said to neglect This Salvation:
 And,

2^{dly}, To make out the Reason of the
 Proposition laid down.

For the First, Men may in the *Ge-*
neral be said to neglect This great Salva-
 tion;

tion; either by refusing to embrace the Terms of it, when it is tendered to them; or by not living in Obedience to it, after They have embraced it. Discourse VII.

As to the *Former*, Those are Guilty of This, 1st, Who wholly and entirely reject the Christian Religion, when the Proofs of it have been offered to them, and fully laid before them. This was the Case of Those, of whom our Saviour speaks, *Matth. xi. 21. Woe unto thee Chorazin, woe unto thee Bethsaida; for if the mighty Works, which have been done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in Sackcloth and Ashes.* This likewise is the Case of All in every Age of the Gospel, who either obstinately refuse to consider the Arguments which are still urged to prove the Truth of Christianity; or who, notwithstanding their Conviction, refuse to embrace it.

2. Those are highly criminal in This Respect; who, though they do declare for Christianity, yet will not comply with the *Outward Means* of Salvation which Christ himself, or his Apostles, have prescribed. They will go to Heaven, but it shall be their own Way; and if they do, they will have uncommon good Fortune. Can any Thing be a greater Af-

front to Almighty God, than Thus to con-
 VII. temn his Ordinances? Did God take Hu-
 man Nature upon him, and come down
 from Heaven upon so trivial an Errand,
 that Men should think lightly of *any Thing*
 he has enjoined? Even though it be of
 an *external* and *positive* Nature? And
 though they do not understand the *Rea-*
son why it was Instituted? Is not This
 as high an Indignity as we can offer him,
 and with the utmost Propriety a *Neglect-*
ing of his Salvation?

Now Those are more *particularly* Guil-
 ty of This; who, though they profess to
 believe Christianity, and to live accord-
 ingly, yet,

1. *Causelessly refuse Communion* with a
 National Church, established according
 to the Primitive and Apostolical Plan; and
 set up *another Discipline* contrary to it.
 Was it for nothing, think we, that Christ
 invested his Apostles with *All Power*?
 Was it for nothing that, being so em-
 powered, they instituted such a particu-
 lar Model, or Form of Ecclesiastical Go-
 vernment? That They did do it, We
 have proved an hundred times over; so
 that I may here take it for granted. And
 can We dare to set up another Form of
 Government, in Opposition to This? Does
 not

not the Word of God assure us, that the Church is the Body of Christ, and that there should be *no Schism in the Body*? Is not This said expressly in so many Words, 1 Cor. xii. 25, 27. and is not the same Doctrine inculcated in many other Places of the New Testament? Do we not therefore by such a *Separation, Usurpation, Opposition, and Defiance*, cut our selves off from That Body? And is not This to *neglect so great Salvation*? What can we say to These things? And how can the Wit of Man reconcile them to Duty and Religion? Are Pride, Singularity, the Spirit of Contradiction, a moody, perverse, and untractable Temper, or at best Ignorance and Folly, are Any of These, or All of them put together, of Weight sufficient to counterpoise the Institutions of the Apostles, and the Commands of God? These, I know, will be called *hard Sayings*, or *high Sayings*; or some such foolish Word, or other, will be put upon them: Whereas, the only Question is, are they *True Sayings*? If they are; we cannot help either the *Hardness*, or the *Highness* of them: Only This we must observe, that, if they be True, and of the utmost Importance, as they are undoubtedly Both, the harder they are, the more earnestly they ought

Discourse
VII.

Discourse

VII.



to be pressed and inculcated; that the
 may be known and avoided. But These
 Things, as we are admonished by Some,
 ought not to be mentioned; or if menti-
 oned, to be gently touched, to be soften-
 ed, and smoothed over; we may aim at
 the Truth, but must be sure not to hit it;
 we must see Men in the Ways of Error
 and Perdition, and be afraid to tell them
 plainly that they are so; and must not do
 them the most *Charitable* Office in the
 World, for fear of incurring the Censure
 of *Uncharitableness*. Were These *Advisers*
 of ours to Answer for Us and our Mini-
 stry at the Day of Judgment; their Ad-
 vice might be of some Force. But since
 We *our selves* are to give an Account of
 the Execution of our Commission to Him
 who gave it us; I ask again, and it will
 bear Repeating, is This Plan of Church-
 Government Apostolical, or is it not? If
 it be, (and we have often proved that
 it is) what shall we say of Those, who,
 in a Nation too where it is established by
 the Laws of the Land, dare set up another
 Discipline in Opposition to it, and in De-
 fiance of it?

2. Of This Guilt Those likewise are
 Partakers, if they know what I am about

to

to mention, who, though they do seem to conform to the Church, yet are really no Members of it; because they are not Baptized. Which is the Case of Such as never received any Baptism, but what is falsely so called; either from acknowledged Laymen, or pretended Clergymen. This in reality is no Baptism at all; and it is the indispensable Duty of such Persons, if they know it, to receive That Sacrament from One of Those who alone have Authority and Commission from Christ to administer it. If they go on in the wilful obstinate Neglect of it; They are not only no Members of Christ, and not included in the Covenant of Grace; but they industriously slight and contemn his Ordinances, and are highly guilty of neglecting so great Salvation.

3. Hither likewise may be reduced another Sort of Men, who, though they call themselves Christians, are Baptized, and do Communicate with the Church, yet have not a true *Value* and *Esteem* for the *peculiar Privileges* of Christianity; who make it a Thing almost, if not altogether, indifferent what Religion Men are of, and speak with too much respect of the *Moral Heathen*; they Themselves being

Discourse being little better than *Heathens*, and it
 VII. is well if they are *Moral Ones*. This is
 a high *Neglect of so great Salvation*; Thus
 to slight and undervalue the inestimable
 Benefits and Advantages of the Gospel:
 As if the amazing *Condescension* of the
 Son of God, in coming from Heaven to
 purchase Salvation for us, were to be o-
 verlooked and disregarded by us; and
 it were a Thing indifferent, whether
 Men are included in his Covenant, or
 no.

4. To This Head likewise are to be re-
 ferred all wilful Infidels, and Hereticks;
 as also Those who either hate, or ridicule,
Priests and Priesthood, and all Sorts of *Sa-
 cerdotal Powers*: These Persons and Offi-
 ces being some of the instituted Means
 of our Salvation, Those, whosoever they
 are, that despise the former, cannot but
 be highly guilty of neglecting the latter.
 These Things I only mention *at present*;
 it being proper in a separate Treatise by
 itself to discourse largely and fully upon
 the *Nature and Necessity* of the *external
 Means of Salvation* *. For Want of a due
 Regard to which, the Christian Religion
 seems to be in Danger of being banished

from These Kingdoms. It is from hence Discourse
VII. that the Press groans with Atheism; from hence that such horrid Blasphemies are daily uttered in Conversation, and even Printed and Published to the World, with such an astonishing License, as was never before heard of in any Country, or Age, of Christianity.

2dly, The other Branch of my General Division of Persons *neglecting so great Salvation*, includes Those, who, though they do embrace the Profession of Christianity, are Baptized, do Communicate with the Church, Believe all the Articles of the Christian Faith, and have a due *speculative Value* for it, yet do not live in a *practical Obedience* to it. This Branch cannot be *divided* into so many *subordinate Particulars*, as the Former; inasmuch as it contains no more than the *plain Case* of Those, who acknowledge all the Truths of the Gospel, and yet live wickedly. This being directly or indirectly the Subject of all *Practical Discourses*; it cannot be expected that I should insist so long upon This, as upon the Other. It is however necessary to observe in general, that let Men Believe never so well; be Baptized never so regularly; Communicate with the Church never so constantly;

Discourse ly; nay Defend Christianity never so zealously; and, in the *Speculative* and *Constitutional* way Love it never so heartily: yet, if they habitually and wilfully Transgress but any one single Precept of it, They are still chargeable with the heavy Crime mentioned in my Text, and still *neglect so great Salvation*. It is also requisite to take Notice that the Word *Neglect* is here very emphatically made use of; because the generality of *Ill-livers*, who are *Christians*, are not so *flamingly* and *outrageously* Wicked, as *careless* and *negligent*: In the strictest and most proper Signification of the Word, they *NEGLECT so great Salvation*: They are *Thoughtless*, and *Insensible* of the Privileges afforded them, of the Guilt they contract, and of the Danger they incur. I will at present mention only one Instance, but That shall be a very remarkable one; I mean That of Neglecting to receive the Holy Sacrament. Do Those who slight it really think that our Blessed Saviour was not in earnest, when he instituted That sacred Ordinance? Did he not institute it in the most Solemn Manner imaginable, just before his meritorious Passion, just before his leaving the World, and imposed This easy Task upon all

all his Followers, as a Test of their Love and Gratitude to him, *Do This in Remembrance of Me?* How then can Those be said to live as if they had a due Value for the *great Salvation* which he purchased, who habitually neglect This great Commemoration of it, a Duty so expressly commanded by him, the highest and most important Part of Christian Worship?

Discourse
VII.

Secondly, Having thus considered how many Ways we may neglect This great Salvation, I am in the Second part of This Third General Head to make out the Reason of the Proposition laid down; That Those who do so are in a worse Condition than if That Salvation had never been tendered to them, and are of all Mankind the most inexcusable. Though This be the main Point of All, and the Doctrine of the Text turn chiefly upon it; yet we need not be long either in explaining, or proving it. Nay, a very few Words will suffice for the full Dispatch of it; the Proposition being very clear, and almost self-evident. It is perfectly agreeable to the Maxims and Principles of common Reason in all other Proceedings, that the more Uncontestable the Evidence; the more Extraordinary and Miraculous the Motives of Conviction; the

Discourse

VII.



the Greater the Mercy shewn; the Clearer the Revelation; the more Excellent the Doctrine revealed; the more Illustrious the Person revealing; the more Meritorious the Sufferer for us; the Greater the Price paid for our Redemption; the more Glorious the Reward promised; the more Dreadful the Punishment threatened; the Greater necessarily must be the Obligation, and consequently the more Inexcusable the Disobedience: According to That of our Blessed Saviour, *Luke xii. 47, 48. To whom much hath been given, of him much will be required, and they will ask the more: And, He that knew his Master's Will, and did it not, shall be beaten with many Stripes.* To which may be added That which the Apostle of my Text urges in another Part of his Epistle: *Heb. x. 28, 29. He that despised Moses Law, died without Mercy, under two or three Witnesses. Of how much sorer Punishment, suppose ye, shall He be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the Blood of the Covenant, where-with he was sanctified, an unholy Thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of Grace? The Christian Dispensation is in all respects the greatest that can possibly be conceived or imagined; It is the last Dispensation, not only by the Designation and*

and Appointment of God, but in the Na-Discourse
ture and Reason of the Thing itself: It VII.
must be the last, because there can be no
greater to succeed it. If This therefore
be neglected; (*Heb. x. 26, 27.*) *there can
remain no more Sacrifice for Sin; but a
certain fearful looking for of Judgment, and
fiery Indignation, which shall devour the Ad-
versaries.*



The

and Appointment of God, but in the Na-
ture and Reason of the thing itself: It
must be the last, because there can be no
greater to succeed it. If this therefore
be neglected, (1st. x. 2. 27. that is
man no more suffers for sin; but a
certain partial blessing for judgment, and
his punishment, which shall be in the
future.



The

The Practice of Confounding the Distinction between *Good* and *Evil* Considered, and Exposed.

ISAIAH v. 20.

*Woe unto them that call Evil Good, and
Good Evil; that put Darknes for Light,
and Light for Darknes; that put Bitter
for Sweet, and Sweet for Bitter.*

THE infinite Distance between *Good* Discourse
and *Evil* being, of all Things, so **VIII.**
certain, and (at least in the most impor-
tant Instances) so plain and manifest; it
may appear strange at first sight, that
there should be any Occasion of denoun-
cing a general Woe against Those who
endeavour to transpose, or misrepresent
them. Because one would think it im-
possible, there should be such Men in the
World; any that should engage in a De-
sign which seems so extravagant and im-
practicable.

Discourse practicable. And yet such is the Perverse-
 VIII. ness of Mankind, industrious in Wicked-
 ness, and ingenious to their own Destruction; that even These daring Attempts are continually made: Men seeming insolently to affect a Power beyond That of Omnipotence itself, the Reconciling of Contradictions. And in managing These eternally opposite Principles they are so far successful, that though they cannot *reconcile*, they can at least *confound*; and very often actually do it with great Satisfaction. Which is the Practice and Guilt of Those, who are here so severely threatened.

The main Scope and Design of This Chapter, is to represent God's Complaint against his People the *Jews*; in which, by the Mouth of his Prophet, he expostulates with them for their Degeneracy and Corruption; and their proving obstinately Disobedient, contrary to what he had the greatest Reason to expect from them, considering the extraordinary Care which had been taken, on His Part, to cultivate and instruct them. This, at the Beginning of the Chapter, is elegantly insinuated in the Parable of a Vineyard: And though the Comparison be in it self so easy and natural, that it seems to need no Application; yet to make it evident beyond all doubt, He applies it

it in exprefs Words to That revolting and rebellious People. *For the Vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the House of Israel, and the Men of Judah his pleasant Plant; and he looked for Judgment, but behold Oppression; for Righteousness, but behold a Cry.* And, after having in general reprehended them for their shameful and most inexcusable Apostasy, He proceeds to expose some of their particular Abominations, denouncing Vengeance against each of them severally; their Covetousness, Pride, and Luxury, and, among the rest, That which is described in my Text; *Woe unto them that call Evil Good, and Good Evil; that put Darkeness for Light, and Light for Darkeness; that put Bitter for Sweet, and Sweet for Bitter.*

Expositors, without mentioning any other Sense of the Words, commonly understand them as relating to the Sin of *Injustice*, especially to that which is of a *Judicial* nature; and as levelled against Those, who being entrusted with the publick Administration of Judgment, pervert the Course of it by putting Wrong for Right, and Right for Wrong, by determining Causes contrary to Law, Reason, and Equity; by acquitting the Guilty, and condemning the Innocent. But though that be *one*, yet most certainly

Discourse it is not the *only* Design of the Words:

VIII. Which are plainly to be understood in *general*, of all Persons, of what Quality, or Condition soever, who labour to *invert the Nature of Things*, by *miscalling*, and *disguising* them; who, by blending and shuffling *Ideas*, endeavour to transpose even *Contraries* themselves, and confound the *Notions of Good and Evil*. In This wider *Acceptation* it will, I conceive, be proper to discourse upon the Words.

It is too plain to require any Proof, that *Light* and *Darkness*, *Bitter* and *Sweet*, are here to be understood not literally, or in a Sense distinct from Those other Terms, *Good* and *Evil*: but only as figurative and illustrating Expressions, meaning the same Thing. It is certain they are not to be taken in a *proper* Signification: For besides that Those Things are not of a *Moral* Nature, and so can have no Connexion with any Point of *Duty* or *Transgression*; They *cannot* (strictly speaking) be transversed, or put one for another. Some sorts of *Good* and *Evil* indeed being *mixed* and *complicated* Conceptions, not only the *Words*, but the very *Ideas*, may be confounded; but *Light* and *Darkness* being *sensible* ones, the *Ideas* cannot be transferred, though the Words may. However, *Good* and *Evil* are full
as

as opposite in their Natures, as any sensible Discourse
contrary Qualities whatsoever; though VIII.
the former may be more easily mistaken
for each other, than the latter. And their
being as opposite as Light and Darkness,
Bitter and Sweet, and the like, is the
Reason why Those metaphorical Expres-
sions are made use of to illustrate the Con-
trariety that is between them.

In discoursing upon the Words thus
opened, I shall consider

I. *First*, How far the Names and Notions
of Good and Evil are Capable of being
confounded, transposed, and put one for
another.

II. *Secondly*, When, or in what parti-
cular Instances, Men are often *Actually*
guilty of such Misrepresentation.

III. *Thirdly*, What are the chief *Causes*
and *Principles* of so perverse a Practice.

IV. *Fourthly*, The extreme *Wickedness*,
and *destructive Consequences* of it. And,

V. *Lastly*, What we must do to *secure*
our selves from being *seduced*, and delu-
ded, by it.

I. As to the First of These; The No-
tions of Good and Evil in *general* cannot be
changed, nor transposed, nor the Distin-
ction between them be taken away.

Discourse *Pleasure and Pain, Happiness and Misery,*
 VIII. are such very clear and distinct Sentiments; that, as it is impossible they should Themselves be mistaken for each other, so they will for ever sufficiently distinguish Those Principles which are apt to cause and produce them. The Names indeed may be *altered*, like Those of Light and Darkness; but *These Conceptions* can no more be varied or transferred, than *Those*. The Words likewise may be used *promiscuously*: Which indeed will make Men talk so as not to be understood; but will not confound These eternally distinct Conceptions. A Third obscure, and unintelligible, Notion may also perhaps arise out of them. And in These Instances seems to consist all the Confusion that Good and Evil *in general* are capable of: How far *particular* ones may be mixed and disguised, must be our next Enquiry.

That *particular* Thing then which is really Good, may by false Names and Colours be represented as Evil; and so on the Reverse. Thus it happens in the Case of *Moral* Good and Evil: Vice in general may be recommended, and Virtue in general decry'd; and the same Misrepresentation may be made, with respect to any particular Vertue, or Vice,
 of

or any Good, or Bad Action. But then Discourse
 Vertue and Vice *in general* cannot be put VIII.
 for *each other*; any more than Good and
 Evil *in general*, or Light and Darkness:
 These Conceptions, like *Those*, being so
 clearly and distinctly opposite; and to
 observe, and not observe, Laws, being
 Terms of direct Contradiction. Neither
 can the *Distinction* between them be ta-
 ken away; while they *at all remain in*
the Mind. Indeed it may be lost *one way*;
 because the *Ideas themselves* may be lost,
 and expunged out of the Minds of Men:
 Which is to be done, only by destroying
 the Notions of all Law and all *Moral Ob-*
ligation, upon which the Nature of Duty
 and Transgression entirely depends. But
 I say, while These Notions are in their
 Minds; they can never be transferred, or
 mistaken for each other.

The main Difficulty therefore, and
 the greatest Danger of Mischief and Con-
 fusion, is between *particular Vertues* and
Vices; which may easily be transposed
 and misrepresented, by reason of the
 great Number of *subordinate* Ideas which
 concur in the Composition of These *more*
complex ones, the particular various *Cir-*
cumstances attending them, and That *Sha-*
dow of Resemblance which is sometimes be-
 tween them. Their true Limits and

Discourse

VIII.

Boundaries are not always palpably manifest; and Some are much more easy to be mistaken than Others, by reason of the seeming Nearness and Affinity of their Natures. Here not only the *Names*, but the very *Notions*, may be mixed, by leaving out some of the true constituent Parts, and taking in Those which are foreign, and belong to another Combination. But though Those Vertues and Vices are *most liable* to be confounded, which have some Appearance of *Likeness* and Resemblance; yet *sometimes* Men may be so infatuated, as to put the most monstrous Crimes for laudable Qualities, and the most illustrious Moral Excellencies for Sins. Here it is hard to conceive that the *Ideas* are changed, though it is not impossible but they may: It is certain the *Names* are perverted; and the Misapplication of Words never fails to confound the Notions themselves, whenever they are *capable* of such Confusion.

But after all, Good and Evil, Vertue and Vice, both in the general, and in particular Instances, continue *in themselves* just as they were before, notwithstanding This Mixture of Words and Conceptions. This alters not the Natures of Things; but they still remain unvariably the same. For though These *Moral Ideas*

Ideas are of a very different kind from *Sensible* ones, which, without any Action of ours, are excited in us by outward Objects, and in the Production of which we are purely passive; though they are made up by the Operation of the Mind, which joins together the several Parts of which they are compounded; yet in This Case also there is such a Thing as *real Nature* without us, to which they all ought to be referred. The *Eternal Ideas* in the *Mind of God* are the Patterns and Standards of *Ours*; and the Last are only so far true, as they agree and correspond with the First. This Rule (which, so far as we are concerned in it, is by the Light of Reason and Revelation together sufficiently discovered to us) is That which we are to observe in forming These compound Notions. Which (though they are collected by our *voluntary Thoughts* and Reflections, yet) are not so far *Arbitrary*, that we are at Liberty to make them at random, or according to our Will and Pleasure. If we do, we are guilty of very grievous Sin, as I shall shew in its proper Place; and, at last, we do not *change* Things, but only *misapprehend*, or *misrepresent*, them; This *Confusion* no more altering the Nature of Good and Evil, than a
Mask

Discourse
VIII.

Discourse *Mask, or a Disguise, can alter the Nature*
 VIII. of a *Man.*



Having thus dispatched the First Thing I proposed, and endeavoured to shew how far the Names and Notions of Good and Evil are *capable* of being confounded; I proceed now to my Second, in which I am to consider

II. When, and in what particular Instances, Men are often *Actually* guilty of such Misrepresentation.

Though it seems the clearer Method to consider This in a Head distinct from the preceding; yet there is so clear a Connection between them, that Part of what is to be insisted upon in *This*, has been unavoidably touched upon in *That*. But now to prosecute This Subject a little more at large; Men are guilty of the Sin, and obnoxious to the Punishment, expressed in my Text,

1. By disguising and mixing *Truth with Falsehood* in their Reasonings and Speculations; or endeavouring to give the One the Air and Resemblance of the Other. For These (especially in Matters of Importance) are properly Good and Evil, being the Objects of the Will, as well as of the Understanding. We universally
 desire

desire Knowledge, and have as natural ^{Discourse}
an Aversion for Ignorance and Error. **VIII.**

And there is all the Reason in the World that we should; since our Happiness or Misery so greatly depends upon our right, or wrong, Information. Whosoever therefore puts Falsehood for Truth, if the Subject be of any Consequence to us, may, with the utmost Propriety, be said to put Evil for Good; in the more *Vulgar* Phrase he puts *Darkness* for *Light*, while upon Himself and Others he imposes Error for Argument, and Lyes instead of Demonstration. In This Guilt are involved all Those (and too many such there are in the World) who by their ridiculous Sophistry, and impudent Pretences to Reason, make it their Business to dispute against the Principles of Christianity; nay, endeavour to take away all Distinction between Vertue and Vice, or to prove that there is no such Thing as Either; to obliterate all Notions of Law and Obedience, and to make Religion no better than a mere State-Engine, or Tool of Policy.

Nor is it easy to be imagined, how Those will entirely get clear of This Imputation, who in Matters of very great Moment (though less than the Being of Religion) argue contrary to the Reason
and

Discourse and Common Sense of all Mankind. As
 VIII. if (for example) any one should insist
 upon it, that the way to Support an E-
 stablished Constitution, is to admit its E-
 nemies into its Bowels; or that the true
 Method to discourage any Faction of
 Men, is to entrust them with Power and
 Authority.

2. Men bring This Guilt upon their
 Souls, by recommending Vice, and tra-
 ducing Vertue; by representing the One
 as fit to be embraced, and the Other as
 undesirable. Which indeed supposes the
 Practice of wilful fallacious Reasoning,
 mentioned in the foregoing Particular;
 but then it supposes something else; and
 is a more direct Method of putting Good
 and Evil for each other. This is the Em-
 ployment of Those who endeavour to
 persuade the World that Religion is an
 uneligible Thing; a melancholy, dis-
 mal, and uncomfortable Institution; at-
 tended only with Inconveniencies, and
 destitute of Rewards: On the other side,
 applauding a wicked Course, as the only
 Way to Pleasure and Happiness, as be-
 ing most agreeable to Human Reason,
 and the true Use of our Natural Appe-
 tites. These, and such like, are the per-
 verse Arguings of some Men, who (Co-
 los. ii. 8.) *are spoiled through Philosophy,*
 (falsely

(falsely so called) and vain Deceit, after Discourse
the Rudiments of the World, and not after VIII.

Christ. Hither likewise is to be reduced the detestable Practice of Scoffing at Religion, or endeavouring to render it ridiculous; and That of labouring to bring Vice into Credit and Reputation. Of the same nature is all This Guilt, when it respects any *particular* Vertue, or Vice, or even any *single Action* of Either; when by Slander, or Ridicule, we strive to make the Former either Odious or Contemptible, and by as false Representation to procure Love, or Reverence, for the Latter. Thus Forgiveness of Injuries shall be condemned by Some as Pernicious, and laughed at by Others as Weakness and Folly: Prophaneness, and all manner of Debauchery, shall pass for very desirable Qualities, and the Accomplishments of a Gentleman; Revenge for a Proof of Valour; and Murder for the Vindication of One's Honour. But,

3. The Guilt here mentioned is *chiefly*, and most commonly, contracted by putting some *particular* Vertues and Vices for each other; which is especially done between Those which seem to have some Resemblance, and so are more easy to be confounded and disguised. How, and how easily, This may be effected, we have

Discourse have already considered; and every day's
VIII. Experience affords us Examples in abundance of its being actually put in practice. On the one hand, for Instance, according as Occasion requires, Humility is called Littleness of Spirit, Meekness Cowardise, and Bravery Ostentation: Frugality passes for Covetousness, Generosity for Extravagance, Courage for Rashness, and a due Care of one's Reputation for Pride and Vain-glory. And it is as true, on the other hand, that These Vices, with many more which we need not mention, as often go under the Name and Shadow of Those adjacent Vertues. As Covetousness has the Stile of Frugality, Cowardise of Meekness; and so in the other Instances.

But This fantastical Inversion of the Notions of Things is chiefly to be observed in Those which are of a *publick* and *popular* Nature; because the Temporal Interests of Men, and the Prejudices of Parties and Factions, are more especially concerned to misrepresent them. Thus a firm Adherence to the best and noblest Principles shall be Obstinacy, or Pride; and a due Fervour in the Vindication of them shall be Rage and Fury: While, on the other side, Indifferency and Lukewarmness shall have the good Luck

to

to pass for Charity, Unsteadiness for Discourse
Complaisance, and Baseness for Conde- VIII.
scension. Nay, it shall be esteemed
Good-nature to be unconcerned in the
Cause of a good Conscience, Prudence
to desert it, and Moderation to betray
it. And so great is the Inequality of Dis-
pensations, with respect to *different Cases,*
and Persons; that Zeal shall be unpardon-
able in the Best of Causes, and merito-
rious in the Worst: A true Religious
Warmth in the resolute Discharge of his
Duty, though perfectly free from all Un-
christian, and even all undecent, Passion,
shall be Violence and Uncharitableness
in One Man; while, in defence of the
most unjustifiable Practices, and in pro-
secution of as bad Designs, the bitterest
Railing, and the most implacable Ma-
lice, shall be Calmness, and Temper, and
Moderation in Another. So that here
is not only the *Absurdity* of transforming
Vertue and Vice; but This strange Trans-
formation is wrought by *Means* which
seem to have a quite *different* Tendency.
If such preposterous Changes *must* be
made; one would think it should be al-
ways something *Evil* which should make
Good look like Evil, and so on the other
side. But it sometimes happens quite
contrary; and there is, it seems, so much
Holi-

Discourse
VIII.

Holiness in a wicked Cause, that it can consecrate Vice; and so much Prophaneness in a good One, that it will debase and unsanctify Vertue.

And though (as was said) Those good and bad Qualities are most likely to be confounded, which seem to have some Affinity in their Natures; yet sometimes Men have so long accustomed themselves to This way of Fallacy and Collusion, insensibly sliding from one Degree of it to another; that they are at last come to such a Pitch, as to dignify the most monstrous Crimes with the Stile of Religion. As Schism, Murder, Rebellion, Sacrilege, and Regicide, and a thousand other Enormities, were once, by a most unheard of *Latitude* or *Comprehension*, all included under the general Notion of Reformation, and Zeal for God's Glory: Nay, the grossest Villanies were put for Those very Duties to which they are Diametrically opposite; Rebellion was Loyalty, and Fighting *against* the King was Fighting *for* him. To such amazing Infatuation, or such an unaccountable Degree of Lying, may Men at last advance; nor can any Mortal determine where they will probably stop, when once they are thoroughly engaged in a Design so prodigiously Wicked and Unnatural.

And

And as Vices are sometimes honoured Discourse
with the Titles even of Those Vertues to **VIII.**
which they are most directly contrary ;
so, on the other hand, there are not want-
ing Some, who slander and traduce par-
ticular Vertues, by giving them the
Names of their opposite Vices. Thus of
a Man truly poor in Spirit, and lowly in
his own Eyes, it shall be said, that his
pretended Humility is nothing but Pride ;
and that he is really proud by seeming
to be Humble. Such Reflections as These
are often most injuriously made : It is
true, it sometimes happens that the Case
is really so ; but still we are very blame-
able, in making such Judgments at ran-
dom, or without due Consideration.
Those Qualities being so very opposite,
Men ought to be fully assured that they
are put for each other, before they pass
such nice and critical Censures. For if
the Person thus condemned be not a Hy-
pocrite, he who condemns him is plainly
a Slanderer ; and if the One does not call
Evil Good, it is most certain that the O-
ther calls Good Evil.

The mention of Hypocrisy suggests
another Instance of the Sin we are dis-
cussing of, which is to be ranked un-
der This Third Particular ; it being the
Business of the Hypocrite to make his

Discourse Vices pass for Vertues, and deceive the
 VIII. World by a continued Cheat and Impos-
 ~~~~~ ture.

As for nice Cases relating to single Actions or Circumstances; These are sometimes really, and in their own Nature, difficult to be distinguished. This therefore belongs not properly to our present Subject; it not being very material, and it being sometimes hard for the most honest and industrious Enquirers to determine in These Emergencies. So that if they should happen to be in the Wrong, they would not be guilty of That Misrepresentation of which we are now discoursing.

If it be enquired, whether Vice be so often put for Vertue, as Vertue for Vice; it seems probable that it is not. Because Men do not altogether so much serve their Ends and Interests by *That*, as by *This*. And for the same Reason it may not be so easy to be done, because not so much practised; the World not being accustomed to this way of Deceiving. Not but that, in the Nature of the Thing itself, it may be as easy as the other; perhaps easier. As it requires less Skill and Pains to paint a beautiful Face disagreeable, than a disagreeable One beautiful.

4. Those are eminently and signally chargeable with the Crime here mentioned; who, being any way concerned in the Administration of Publick Justice, endeavour to pervert the Course of it, and hinder it from taking its due Effect. This Case is different from all Those above-mentioned; inasmuch as it relates not to Religion in general, nor even to any particular Vertues and Vices; but only to single Facts, Causes, and Circumstances, which alone are the Objects of Judicial Enquiries. If *Judges* then proceed not uprightly between Man and Man, in Matters of controverted Rights and Possessions; or in criminal Cases condemn the Innocent, and let the Guilty go free; If *Pleaders* labour by the Flourishes of Wit and Eloquence to gild and set off Injury and Oppression, to burnish and brighten a wicked Cause, or to cloud, blacken, and asperse, a good One, by fallacious Subtleties to give a wrong Turn to the Merits of it, to baffle and confound Witnesses, in order to evade the Evidence which is laid before them, If *Either*, or *Both*, endeavour to elude Right and Equity, by bending and warping the Laws contrary to their natural Tendency, and torturing them till they speak a Sense which they know nothing of;

Discourse

of ; What is all This but putting *Evil* for  
**VIII.** *Good, and Good for Evil*, in the plainest,  
 and most emphatical, Sense of the Words?  
 Hither also is to be referred the Guilt of  
 Bribery, Subornation, and False-witnes-  
 sing; and, in short, every Kind, or De-  
 gree, of Corruption in all Persons what-  
 soever, who any way belong to the  
 Courts of Judicature, so as to have a  
 Share in the Administration of Justice.  
 Or if These Practices be not manifestly  
 enough implied in my Text, the Words  
 a very little after it are sufficiently plain:  
 In which there is a particular Woe de-  
 nounced against Those, Ver. 23. *who ju-  
 stify the Wicked for Reward, and take away  
 the Righteousness of the Righteous from him.*

And Thus having endeavoured to shew  
 how far Good and Evil are *Capable* of  
 being put for each other, and in what  
 Cases they are often *Actually* so confound-  
 ed; I pass on to consider, in the Third  
 Place,

III. What are the Chief *Causes* and  
*Principles* of so perverse a Practice.

These then, according to the more ge-  
 neral Division, seem reducible to Two;

**IGNORANCE, and  
 PREJUDICE.**

1. As



1. As to the *First*; It is hardly to be imagined that This is often, or in many Instances, the Cause of it. Some few, that are called Rational Creatures, may be so grossly Ignorant, as not to know the plainest and most common Distinctions of Morality: And This, not only in any *Christian*, but even in any *Civilized*, Country, must be voluntary and affected. Many more, no doubt, may be Ignorant in lower, and less important Instances; but This, though bad enough, cannot be near so dangerous or so excusable as the Other. But,

2. *Prejudice* is the chief, and most frequent, Cause of This Misrepresentation: When a Man *knows* well enough what is Right, and Wrong, but by the Force of Prepossession will not *own* it. Having a strong Bias upon his Will, in favour, or disfavour, of any Person, or Cause, he wrests the Notions of Things to his own Purposes, and disguises Good and Evil to serve Those Ends which he aims at. Being suborned by his Will, he speaks against his Judgment, so long till he spoils and misleads his Judgment; Thus first deceiving Others, and afterwards Himself. But because there are Prejudices of various Kinds, which are the Causes of This pernicious Practice;

Discourse

(for any particular Vice, Folly, Opinion, VIII. Passion, or even Humour, may, some time or other, be the Principle from which it flows) I shall mention some of the more eminent and remarkable Ones; it being endless to take notice of them All. The *Prejudices* then which are most likely to be the Causes of This Confusion, are Those of Custom and Education; of worldly Interest; of a craving Appetite; of Shame; of Malice; of Pride, and Envy; and lastly, of a wicked Life in general.

I. As to the First of These *Prejudices*, That of *Custom* and *Education*; it is sufficiently known with what Zeal and Eagerness Those Principles or Opinions are commonly defended, in which Men have been bred up, or to which they have been long habituated; with what passionate Fondness they are loved, and with what Idolatry they are worshipped and adored. Rather than part with These Darlings of their Souls, they will assert Any thing, or deny Any thing; reject the plainest Proofs, and digest the most shocking Contradictions. For shall they recede from a Persuasion which they were born to, and which they inherit like their Estates? A Persuasion, of which all their Friends are tenacious, and which their  
Conver-

Conversat<sup>ion</sup> has so diligently cultivated Discourse  
and improved? No; Sooner shall the **VIII.**  
Order of Nature be inverted; Black  
shall be White, and Truth Falshood.  
And instead of trying and examining a-  
ny Favourite Principle by the only true  
Rule which Reason, or Scripture, has  
sufficiently laid down, they make That  
Principle the Rule and Standard of Every  
thing else; Whatever agrees with it is  
Good, and whatever contradicts it is E-  
vil. So that These, *even having the Law,*  
*are a Law unto Themselves*; but then  
That Law is not *Conscience*, but *Prepos-*  
*session*; which they set up, in Opposition  
to the clearest Light that can be given  
them. And Thus, by a strange and un-  
accountable Privilege, the *Custom* of any  
particular Sett, or Faction, of Men shall  
supersede, or over-rule, the standing and  
written *Laws*, not only of their *Country*,  
but even of *God Himself*.

2. The mighty Sway which *Temporal*  
*Interest* bears in the World, and the ex-  
ceeding strong Biass which it puts upon  
Mens Minds, even to make them trans-  
pose Contraries themselves, is likewise  
too manifest to be long insisted upon.  
It is for This that they so carefully dis-  
guise the Vices which they have, and  
pretend to the Vertues which they have



Discourse not: It is This that makes them Act contrary to common Honesty, and Argue contrary to common Sense; that can make a Peace-maker Guilty, and a Murderer Innocent; Loyalty unpardonable, and Treason meritorious. And, what is yet more wonderful, That which is Good or Evil one day, shall be quite contrary the next; Not upon any Alteration of Circumstances in the Thing, but in the Person that judges of it; as the same Object appears in Colours different from what it did before, not upon the Account of any Change in it self, but in the Eye that sees it. The strange Power which Temporal Interest has to pervert Mens Understandings, and make them confound the Distinctions of Right and Wrong, is in the Scriptures elegantly expressed, by *blinding their Eyes*. Thus Samuel, the great Judge of Israel, at his Resigning that high and honourable Employment, challenges the People to lay any Corruption to his Charge; 1 Sam. xii. 3. *Whom have I oppressed, and at whose hand have I received any Bribe to blind mine Eyes therewith?* And Deut. xvi. 19. *Thou shalt not wrest Judgment, Thou shalt not respect Persons, neither take a Gift; for a Gift doth blind the Eyes of the Wise, and pervert the Works of the Righteous.* And in many

many other Instances, besides This of Discourse  
Corruption in Judgment, Mens Eyes are **VIII.**  
frequently Thus blinded; even Then, when  
they are said to be most enlightened.

3. Another *Prejudice*, which is apt to occasion This Prevarication, is That of a *craving* and *unruly Appetite*. Being hard pressed by the Uneasiness of a longing Inclination to any forbidden Pleasure, and yet startled at the Sin and Danger which attends it, Men will be apt to use all the Fallacious and Treacherous Reasonings they are Masters of, to *prove* That Lawful which they would fain *have* so, and to make their Lusts reconcileable with their Duty. Such Pains will they take to cheat and delude themselves: And very slight Arguments will be effectual to deceive Those, who not only are willing, but labour, to be deceived.

4. The *Shame* of wicked or dishonourable Actions is sometimes the Occasion of This Misrepresentation. When a Man has done, or is about to do, a foolish or unwarrantable Thing; and has the Baseness, or Unlawfulness, of it fairly laid before his Eyes, and urged home upon his Conscience: Rather than take That Shame upon him which is his Due, he will

Discourse

VIII.

will use all imaginable Arts to palliate and disguise Those Vices or Follies which it is impossible to justify. This is especially the Case of Those who are prejudiced by Fear and Cowardise; who would be good Men, if they durst; and have Inclination to do their Duty, but want the Courage. These are put to a thousand Shifts and Evasions, to bring themselves off, and appear with a tolerable Grace; endeavour to alter the Nature of Those Actions which they cannot defend; and rather chuse to have Religion represented in false Colours, than Themselves in their true ones.

5. Men often turn Vertue into Vice, and Condemn what they ought to Praise; when they are acted by the Prejudices of *Spight* and *Malice*. Nothing is more common, than to hear them inveigh against Those they hate, even for That which deserves to be Honoured and Rewarded. Their first Endeavour indeed is commonly to alledge false Matter of Fact, and deny that the Persons they are Prepossessed against, ever did Those Things, or have Those Qualities, which are pretended and supposed. But if That will not do, they immediately betake themselves to the other Method; and rather



rather than One, whom they detest, shall be thought to have any Good in him, Good itself shall be Evil, and Merit an Abomination. Discourse  
VIII.

6. It frequently proceeds from a Principle of *Pride*, or *Envy*. I mention These together; because the Latter is often a Consequence or Effect of the Former; and Men endeavour to lessen the Characters of Others, in order to heighten and recommend their Own. By the Prejudices therefore of Vain-glory and Self-conceit, they strive to make Deformity itself appear Beautiful in their own Persons; and, by the tainting Breath of Envy, labour to Blast and Wither the most flourishing Graces with which Others are adorned. Sometimes, to gratify These vicious Appetites, they are for an universal Levelling of Characters, and almost making all Mankind alike. By lessening the good Qualities of Some, and the bad ones of Others, they endeavour to put all upon an Equality: By which Means they hope to make Themselves appear as well as the rest of their Neighbours; which they are sensible they cannot do, without taking These indirect Measures, and bringing down Others to their own Size and Dimensions. Upon the

Discourse the same Motive of Pride they often contract This Guilt, merely to humour the ridiculous Vanity of Jestings; especially if it be joined with the Spirit of Trifling and Levity: They think it an Argument of a vivacious Genius, to call the most serious Things in the World by contrary Names; and pretending to be Wits, are really Fools.

7. The last and worst *Prejudice* which I assigned as a Cause of This detestable Practice, was that of a *profligate Life in general*. Those *particular* Vices and Follies above-mentioned may be, and often are, the Occasions of it in particular Instances, or inferior Degrees: But an entire Habit of Wickedness puts Men upon the most desperate Attempts to undermine all Religion; which they cannot hope to do by any likelier Methods, than by That of which we are discoursing. A flagitious and dissolute Course of Living makes Infidels of Some, Scepticks of Others, and Enemies to God and Goodness of All. And Those, to whom either of These Characters belongs, will be apt to endeavour to take away all Distinction between the most contrary and important Notions of Morality. So that they labour to pervert the Idea's of Religion,

ligion, because they live in constant Op-<sup>Discourse</sup>position to it; and *put* Darkness for Light, <sup>VIII.</sup>  
upon the same Principle that they *love* <sup>John iii.</sup>  
*Darkness rather than Light; because their* 19.  
*Deeds are Evil.* Which brings me to  
consider in the Fourth Place,

IV. The extreme *Wickedness*, and *De-  
structive Consequences*, of This execrable  
Practice.

That the Guilt of it is most heavy,  
and its Tendency pernicious, is plainly  
implied in the Words of my Text;  
which denounces Woe and Vengeance  
against it. Nor can it be conceived to  
be otherwise; if we consider only the  
above-mentioned Principles from which  
it flows; it being impossible that any but  
very bad Effects should proceed from  
such corrupt Causes. To put Good and  
Evil for each other in any Sense, even in  
the lowest Cases and Degrees, must  
needs be highly Criminal, and Provoking  
to Almighty God. But to do it in the  
most important Instances, and that too  
with Deliberation, and Malice, is un-  
doubtedly the most exalted Pitch of  
Wickedness. It is directly doing the  
Devil's Work for him; and he himself  
cannot



Discourse cannot more effectually advance the Interest of his Kingdom. By spoiling Men's Understandings, blinding their Judgments, perverting their Reason, and, in short, making the whole intellectual World a perfect Chaos and Mass of Confusion, it quite unravels the Scheme of Morality, and breaks up the very Foundations of all Religion. That it does so, is plain, and needs no Proof: For when the Notions of Good and Evil, of Vertue and Vice, are thus huddled and confounded; how is it possible for any such Thing as Religion to subsist in the World? And then it is the highest Insolence against God that can well be imagined; not only to break his Laws, but to pretend even to cancel and repeal them.

And what must be the Consequences of it, with respect to the Peace, Society, Government, and Well-being, even of This World, is not at all difficult to determine. How many miserable Souls then must perish everlastingly by it in the Next? And what therefore must be the Punishment of Those, who are involved in This most horrid Guilt of contriving the eternal Destruction of Others, and ruining so many Thousands besides Themselves?

Nor

Nor ought it, in some Instances, to escape unpunished even in This Life. Shall Those who contradict the fundamental Principles of Morality, and the common Reason of Mankind, traduce the great Truths of Christianity, and endeavour to destroy the very Being of Government, either in Church, or State, and, by so doing, put Light for Darkness, and Good for Evil, with the coolest and most deliberate Malice, and in the most publick and impudent Manner, shall Such be connived at, and suffered to go on with Impunity? Certainly, the Ends and Maxims even of Human Government require that they should not; and These (if any) are *Iniquities to be punished by the Judges*, Job iii. 11. Discourse VIII.

And, accordingly, our Wise and Pious Legislators have made Provision in This Particular: And surely it is the Duty of all Persons, in their several Stations, as much as in them lies, and as far as it properly belongs to them, to promote the Execution of the Laws against such Offenders; of private Subjects, to convict, and of Magistrates, to punish them. Nor is it without Reason that This is here mentioned. The Wicked, and even Blasphemous, Books which are Published among

Discourse among us, to the Shame and Reproach  
 VIII. of our Country, give more than sufficient Occasion for These Reflections. Infamous Libels upon almost Every thing that is Good; which defy all Authority both Human and Divine, tend to the Unhinging of all Government, especially the Ecclesiastical, to the Annulling of all Sacred Ministerial Orders, and to the utter Extirpation of Christianity it self.

Though such desperate abandoned Wretches, as the Authors of These Writings, are fitter to be dealt with by Penalties than by Arguments; yet, to the Confusion of their little Reasonings, they have had the latter afforded them, which they *do not* deserve; and therefore are not hardly dealt with, if they have likewise the former, which they *do* deserve. For Men ought not to be at Liberty to Dispute about Any thing; or to vent what Notions they think fit. It may, peradventure, be called *Persecution*, or a Hindrance of *Free-Thinking*, to entrench upon This Privilege, to which they have *so natural a Right*; but, for all That, they have not This uncontrollable Licence in Cases which are of a much lower, and less important, Nature.



ture. Let them be as *free Thinkers* as they please, they are not suffered (and it is not fit they should be) to question the Titles of Kings: And shall God's be questioned? They are punished (and that very justly) for slandering, or even speaking irreverently of, Princes; nay, of Subjects who are invested with Power and Authority: And shall they be permitted to blaspheme Christ, and deny God the absolute Government of the World? Must there be a Toleration too for such Hellish Outrages as These? Shall it be suggested, without a severe Animadversion, \* "That God's Right to reign over the *Jews*, as their Prince, was founded upon Contract?" Shall it be said (though with never so much Artifice, and in the pretended Person of Another) that † "if Those Writings, which the Clergy call Scriptures, are of their Side; there is no doubt but they are of their own Inventing? And if *Jesus Christ*, their Patron, laid the Foundation of Those Powers which they claim to themselves under him; the old *Romans* did him Right in punishing him

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\* *Rights of the Christian Church*, p. 151.

† *Account of the Growth of Deism in England*, p. 7.

Discourse "with the Death of a Slave?" Shall not

**VIII.** *God visit for These Things, and shall not his Soul be avenged on such a Nation as This?*

If Men are suffered to commit all These Abominations, and to publish such horrid Blasphemies; what can we expect, but ill Success in War, and all other our Affairs? For how can we think that God will espouse Our Cause, if we so tamely and scandalously desert His?

To These which I have mentioned, and such like Insolencies in Wickedness, will Those at last advance, who have given themselves over to such a Licence and Dissolution of Principles, to such a Libertinism of Reasoning, as well as Living, and have thrown off all Those Restraints which God has ordained, to curb the unruly Lusts and Appetites of Men. These likewise are the Effects of their implacable Rage and Fury, against Those Sacred Ordinances which He has instituted: They will stick at nothing, to gratify the Rancour and Virulence with which they are transported; but defy God, rather than not shew their Spight against his Church; and disgorge their Malice, though by swallowing Blasphemy.

But,

But, as the Difference of Persons may alter the Degrees of Guilt; Some, according to the Stations in which they are placed, are more unpardonable in putting Good for Evil, and Evil for Good, than Others. And Those in whom it would be most intolerable, are Persons of a Sacred Character. If They, whose Judgment and Authority are, or ought to be, of so much weight, whose proper Business it is to interpret the Scriptures, and truly represent the Mind of God; if They, out of Fear, or Hope, or any sinister Design, should deliver That for Vertue which they knew, or believed, to be Vice; or any way prevaricate, and (2 Cor. iv. 2.) *handle the Word of God deceitfully; of how sore a Punishment would Those be thought worthy, who should mislead the Souls committed to their Charge, prostitute their high and holy Office to such vile Purposes, and bring a Reproach upon That Profession which they ought to adorn!* Our Blessed Saviour assures us, *Matth. v. 19. that whosoever shall break the least of his Commandments, and TEACH MEN S.O., shall be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven.* Should Any then of That Sacred Order make Panegyricks upon the Worst of Men, only because they

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Discourse are Great Men; smooch over some of  
 VIII. their Vices, and praise them for others;  
 ~~~~~ flatter the Dead, to make their Court to  
 the Living; and all at the Expence of
 their Integrity, by venting false Doctrine,
 as well as false Oratory, in order to ad-
 vance their Fortunes, and serve their
 wretched Interests in This World: what
 a Mass of Guilt would they heap upon
 Themselves! They would imitate the
 Example of Judas, in betraying their
 Lord's Religion for Money, as That other
 Traytor did His Person; and without
 the severest, and a *Timely*, Repentance,
 would by the worst Sort of Simony pay
 their Souls as the Purchase of their Pre-
 ferments.

Nay, We who are dedicated to That
 Holy Employment, may, in some mea-
 sure, be *negatively* guilty in This respect.
 We sin not only if we represent Good
 and Evil falsely, but if we decline, or
 avoid, the Opportunities of representing
 them truly; if we be silent when our
 Duty calls us to speak; or if, when we
 do speak, we *prophecy* only *smooth things*,
 (*Isai. xxx. 10.*) if we do not proceed
 according to the Command of God given
 to the Prophet of my Text, *Isai. lviii. 1.*
Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy Voice like a
Trumpet;

Trumpet ; and shew my People their Transgressions, and the House of Jacob their Sins.

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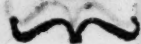
And so from the Consideration of the extreme Guilt, and destructive Consequences, of This Misrepresentation, I proceed, in the Fifth and Last Place, to consider,

V. What *Measures* we must take, that we may not be *seduced*, and deluded by it.

Now all the Cautions to be given under This Head are equally useful, in order to avoid thus deceiving Our selves, and being so deceived by Others. To be secure then from Both, we must take care to be free from all Those Prejudices, Vices, and Follies, before mentioned, with many more of the like nature, which are the Causes of This Confusion ; must be Honest and Sincere in our Purposes, and perfectly Clear from all base Ends and Interests. We must likewise diligently examine the Natures of Things, and give our selves up to be guided by right Reason and Scripture ; which will teach us to distinguish between Good and Evil, even in Those Cases which are pretended to be intricate and abstruse. For

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notwithstanding This Confusion of Words and Notions, there is such a Thing as Truth in the World; and it is not half so difficult to be discovered, as Some are Willing to believe. The true Boundaries between particular Vertues and Vices, Those too which are most apt to be mistaken for each other, are not so very hard to be stated; if Men would but be at the Trouble even of a little Thinking. Thus, for Example, To abstain from Rage and Unchristian Passion, to be patient of Contradiction, to return good Language for bad, and not to be inflamed by Personal Affronts and Reflections, all concur in the Vertue of Meekness. But to suffer God's Honour to be impeached, or his Name to be blasphemed, without shewing any Resentment, or Rebuking the Offender; to permit wicked Men to effect their Designs, when it is our Duty to oppose them, and perhaps in our Power to hinder them; is This Meekness? So indeed it may be called; but it is very plain that here That Vertue expires; and Sloth, or Cowardise, immediately takes place. By Thus separating the constituent Ideas, and considering them distinctly one after another, and

and not suffering them to lie mixed and blended together in the Mind; Men may, with a little Attention, in This, and Other, Instances, clearly distinguish Vertue from Vice, and discern where One ends, and the Other begins. Discourse VIII.

It will likewise be requisite, often and seriously to consider the exceeding Guilt, and Danger, of This detestable Habit; as I have represented it in its proper Place. Which if we do; we shall start with Abhorrence at the Prospect, *abstain from all Appearance of This Evil*, nor dare to venture upon the least Link of This fatal Chain, which draws so many dreadful Consequences after it. And Those who are already intangled in This Guilt, if they would but consider Things, would soon endeavour to extricate themselves out of a Snare so pernicious and destructive. But if they are resolved to be Obstinate and Thoughtless; they must persevere in their Practices, till they receive the Reward of them; and *lift up Those Eyes in Hell*, which they wilfully shut, before they came thither. And when they find themselves in *That Place of Torment*, they will perceive, to their eternal Confusion, that the Art to which they have been so long accustomed, will

296 Of Confounding the Distinction, &c.

Discourse fail them There ; nor will they be able,
 VIII. with all their Skill and Sophistry, to
 prove *That* Evil to be Good, *That* Dark-
 ness to be Light, or *That* Bitter Cup of
 God's Vengeance to be Sweet.



The

The Uneasiness of *Controversies in Religion*; and the absolute Necessity of *Practising* it.

ECCLESIASTES xii. 12, 13.

Further, by These, my Son, be admonished: Of making many Books there is no end; and much Study is a Weariness of the Flesh.

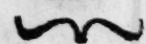
Let us hear the Conclusion of the whole Matter: Fear God and keep his Commandments; for This is the whole Duty of Man.

THE Design of the Royal Preacher Discourse in This admirable Book, is to display the miserable Vanity of Human Life; both as it is in it self, and as it is managed by the Extravagance, and Wick-
edness of Men: To shew the various wrong Judgments they make in their Pursuit

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Discourse

IX.



Pursuit of Happiness, and the utter Impossibility of their ever finding it in This present World. He takes a Survey of all the seeming Goods, which pretend to promise it: Such as are Sensual Pleasure, Riches, and Honour: And, upon a thorough Examination, pronounces them All to be *Vanity, and Vexation of Spirit*. Even Wisdom itself, meaning mere Human Wisdom, or Philosophy, comes off with no better a Verdict: Chap. i. 18. *For in much Wisdom is much Grief; and he that increaseth Knowledge, increaseth Sorrow*. And that for This Reason, because we can never come to the Bottom of Speculative Truth; but are always, more or less, baffled in our Researches after it. I say, *Speculative Truth*: For as to *Moral Wisdom*, he is so far from decrying This, that his whole Business is to recommend it; especially here, in the Words upon which I have chosen to discourse.

Then having discovered our Errors, and rejected Those *False Goods*, which we vainly propose to our selves; He concludes the Whole, according to the Method of judicious Writers, by pointing out the *true Way* to Happiness, and shewing wherein it really consists. This

he

he does in my Text; introducing the ^{Discourse} Rule he would lay down by a most ^{IX.} eloquent and affecting Transition from what he had been Before treating of: *Further, by these, my Son, be admonished, &c.*

Among other Things, in his Detail of Vanities, he had taken notice of the *Diversity of Opinions in Religion*, of the *Controversies*, and *false Doctrines* concerning it; Himself sometimes representing the Person of One who disbelieved, or doubted of, a *future State*. This he does particularly in the Third Chapter, at the 18th and following Verses. Which I mention, to obviate the Ignorance, as well as Impiety and Malice, of certain late Writers; who, from a few Passages in This Book, have the Impudence to represent *Solomon* as an Atheist, or a Deist, expressly denying the Immortality of the Soul. But in the first place, there is no Necessity (nor any thing like it) of interpreting the Preacher's Words in That Sense. For when he says (Ver. 18.) that *Men may see that They themselves are Beasts; as the one dieth, so dieth the other, so that a Man hath no preheminnence above a Beast, &c.* he may very well be understood as speaking only concerning the *Mortal Bodies* of
Both:

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Both : Especially, since in the next Words he makes a plain Distinction between their Souls; Ver. 21. *Who knoweth the Spirit of a Man that goeth upward, and the Spirit of a Beast, that goeth downward to the Earth?*

But should we grant to These Men that Solomon here talks as irreligiously as their Hearts could wish, *i. e.* as irreligiously as Themselves; yet it is plain that he does not (like Them too) speak *his own Opinion*; but either, by way of *Prosopopæia*, assumes the Character of such an Infidel, and so makes the Objection in the first Person; or else mentions such Suggestions as had sometimes risen in his own Thoughts; not that he assents to them, or delivers them as the Result of his cool and deliberate Judgment. Ver. 18. *I said in mine Heart concerning the Estate of the Sons of Men, &c. that they might see that they themselves are Beasts, &c.* For he delivers the quite contrary Doctrine in the Words immediately preceding: Ver. 17. *I said in mine Heart, God shall judge the Righteous, and the Wicked; For there is a Time there for every Purpose, and for every Work.* If it be asked, How shall we know which of These two Opinions was his own? I answer; From the

the whole Scope and Tenour of his Discourse: The main Design of which is evidently to fix and ascertain the great Principles of Morality; From his positive Assertion, Chap. xi. 9. *But know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into Judgment:* From This Chapter, of which my Text is a part, Ver. 7. *Then shall the Dust return to the Earth as it was; and the Spirit shall return to God who gave it:* And from the very last Words of This Book, which immediately follow Those of my Text; *For God shall bring every Work into Judgment, with every secret Thing, whether it be Good, or whether it be Evil.* Which, together with the other Places to the same purpose, must be understood of a *future* Judgment in *another World*; because it appears from Experience, and he himself expressly observes, Chap. ii, ix, and xi, that there is no equal Distribution of Rewards and Punishments in *This*.

There are, it must be confessed, some other Difficulties in This incomparable Treatise, besides That which I have mentioned, occasioned chiefly by the Quickness of his Transitions, and his unconnected way of Writing; which yet are very capable of being explained by a close Application. But, upon the Whole,
its

Discourse
IX.

Discourse IX. its Excellence can never enough be admired: And Those who pretend *They could write as good a Treatise of Morality Themselves*, will be abundantly convicted of their Folly, as well as Blasphemy, by any judicious and attentive Reader; who will see Divine Inspiration, not only in the Substance of what is delivered, but in the astonishing Sublimity of the Thoughts and Expressions, quite different from any Heathen Ethicks, or indeed any Human Writings whatsoever; and the very Difficulties themselves, when thoroughly examined, will appear to be Beauties.

But to come closer to our present Subject. Among other Vanities, as I said, He mentions *Diversity of Opinions in Religion*: And This practical Inference at the Close of his Treatise may as well relate to That, as to any of the Rest; nay, it has a more particular Relation to That, than to any Other. And as I have, in This Collection, considered several difficult, and disputed Points; This Discourse, which I am now opening, seems proper to be the Last of the Number. After the Toil of Arguing, and Contention, upon Religious Subjects; what can be a more natural, as well as useful, and pleasant, Reflection, than This

of

of the Divine Philosopher in my Text? Discourse

Further, by These, my Son, be admonished: IX.
Of making many Books there is no end; and
much Study is a Weariness of the Flesh.

Let us hear the Conclusion of the whole
Matter: Fear God, and keep his Command-
ments; for This is the whole Duty of Man.

Which Words suggest the Five follow-
ing Observations.

I. That Learning, and Religion, very
much contribute to the Furtherance
and Advancement of each other. And
yet,

II. That nothing is more wearisome,
than the Exercise of the Former, in the
Controversies of the Latter; and nothing
more pleasant, than to be relieved from
contending about difficult Points, by ap-
plying our selves to the Study and Pra-
ctice of the plain ones.

III. That Disputes in Religion would
be soon determined; if all Persons, con-
cerned in them, were truly and ingenu-
ously Religious.

IV. That though the Furnishing of the
Understanding with Knowledge be very
difficult; yet the Rectifying of the Will
is much more so.

V. Lastly,

Discourse

IX.

V. Lastly, That Learning without Religion is insignificant; and the grand Result of all, is to *Fear God, and keep his Commandments; which is the whole Duty of Man.*

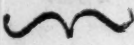
I. My First Observation from the Words was This; That Learning and Religion very much contribute to the Furtherance and Advancement of each other. This, though not expressed, is implied in the Text; by the Connexion which is made between *Study* and *Virtue*. The First indeed is not supposed absolutely necessary to the Last; but it is supposed to be very expedient and conducive towards it. The Wise Man here takes it for granted, that Learning and Books are properly employed in Divine Matters; and greatly contribute to clear and adjust them. Even by the Disjunction and Opposition, which he makes between them, they are so far joined, that they may be supposed apt mutually to assist each other; though *Those* without *These* are useless and insignificant.

I say, They mutually assist each other: For as Learning is a Help to Religion, so Religion is a Help to Learning. Ver-
tue

ture not only regulates the Will, but opens, clears, and enlarges, the Understanding: It in a great measure dispels Those Clouds which obscure the Intellectual Faculty; and removes Those Prejudices which retard, or divert, its Operations. *I have more Understanding than my Teachers*, (says the Royal Psalmist, Ps. cxix. 99, 100.) *for thy Testimonies are my Study: I am Wiser than the Aged, because I keep thy Commandments.* And in This Sense also the Words of Job are verified, *Job xxviii. 28. Behold the Fear of the Lord, That is Wisdom; and to depart from Evil, is Understanding.* And This may be an Admonition, by the way, to the Candidates of Science, to be Good, that they may be Learned; and to excel in Vertue, that they may excel in Knowledge.

True it is, some Men, to whom God has given Talents which they most shamefully abuse, have without Goodness acquired great Learning; but then it is as true, that *with it* they would have acquired *much greater*. The Knowledge they gain without Vertue is either clogged with Intemperance, or perverted by Prejudice: If they Reason acutely, they are apt to Reason fallaciously; and to employ their Abilities in a wrong Cause;

Discourse Cause; which by degrees makes them

IX. *bad Arguers, as well as confirms them bad*
 *Livers.*

But to consider a little more particularly, on the other hand, how much Learning contributes to Religion. Since Inspiration, and other miraculous Assurances are ceased; Depth and Strength in the Art of Reasoning, the Knowledge of Languages, History, and Philosophy, and the like, are necessary to prove and establish, the Truths of Morality, and Christianity. And therefore we can never enough admire the ignorant, as well as rude and unmannered, Reflections of Those, who decry all human Learning, as a Principle of Heathenism, and Carnality. Never considering that *Moses was learned in all the Wisdom of the Egyptians*, Acts vii. 22. that *Solomon*, the Author of my Text, was exquisitely skilled in Natural, as well as Moral, Philosophy; and that *St. Paul* was eminent not only for Jewish, but for Heathen, Learning. The Primitive Fathers found the Use of This Last, even *against the Heathen* themselves; and successfully attacked the Adversaries of Christianity with their own Weapons. And though still, in all Ages, the Arms of Learning, like other Arms, may be employed

ployed in a *good*, or a *bad* Cause; yet not so, that, like Them too, they are perfectly *indifferent* to *Either*: For if they are *truly understood*; they must necessarily be successful for a *good* Cause, and *against* a *bad* one: Which cannot be said of any other War whatsoever.

Discourse

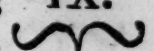
IX.

Those, however, must be mistaken, who are for despising Heresies, and heterodox Opinions; alledging, that they have been answered over and over already, and that it is needless to repeat the Arguments by which they have been so often confuted. If the Objections be revived, the Answers must be revived too; Otherwise it would be impossible for Christianity to subsist long, without as many Miracles to continue it, as were at first wrought to plant and confirm it. I believe it would be thought ill Arguing in War, to say that we need not fight an Enemy advancing with an Army against us, because we have often beaten him already: Or, in respect of our Health, to urge that there is no Occasion for curing a Distemper returning upon us; and to give no Reason but This, that we have frequently cured it Before.

But the Influence of Learning is very considerable, not only with regard to Re-

Discourse *Religion it self*, so as to establish, and propagate it in the World; but particularly with regard to *Those Persons*, who have the Privilege of That Accomplishment, so as to make and confirm them Religious. Those who want it, no doubt, may be, and often are, very good Christians: Otherwise the World would be Wicked indeed; even more Wicked than it is. And far less is certainly expected from the Ignorant and Illiterate, than from Men of These peculiar and eminent Attainments. But still Those who enjoy them have, in respect of Religion, a great Advantage over Those who want them; and if they do not improve them, they are of all Mankind the most inexcusable. Some, it is true, make so perverse a Use of Knowledge, as to become more Wicked *by it*: But This is purely accidental; and Knowledge in its own Nature has a direct contrary Tendency. Though All, who are endued with common Reason, have Talents sufficient to carry them to Heaven; yet Religion being of a spiritual, and, in a great measure, of an abstracted Nature, Those who have habituated themselves to Books and Study, to Thinking and Contemplation, must be more likely to have clearer and larger Views of it, than Others:

thers: To Them, as such, all other Circumstances being equal, Its Evidences must be more bright, and its Beauties more attracting. To be a *true* Philosopher therefore, is the most ready way to be a true Christian; and Learning, if rightly employ'd, is the Handmaid of Religion. But though it be so; yet

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II. Nothing is more wearisome than the Exercise of Learning, in the Controversies of Religion; and nothing more pleasant, than to be relieved from contending about difficult Points, by applying our selves to the Study and Practice of the plain ones. Which was the Second Thing, I propos'd to speak to. *Of making many Books*, Those of Controversy particularly, *there is no end*; and *much Study*, especially such as This, *is a Weariness of the Flesh*. For besides that Disputes, like agitated Water, are apt to run into Circles, still spreading and widening from one another, so that there is, in the figurative Sense, *no end* of them; besides that This Kind of Study is in it self of a difficult Nature, consisting in nice Distinctions, Unravelling of Fallacies, and a great Variety of abstracted Thinking, which is the most intense Labour

Discourse

IX.  besides all This, there is an additional Uneasiness in Contention, *as such*, or *because it is* Contention. There are indeed some Tempers, which delight in Quarrelling for Quarrelling's sake; in Controversies, Law-suits, and Wars. But These, it is to be hoped, are so few; that they are not to be looked upon as Exceptions from *my Rule*, but rather as Exceptions from *Humanity*. All *Christians*, nay all *Men*, who are properly so called, and truly deserve That Name in a Moral Sense, have a natural Aversion to Strife; and think themselves unhappy, whenever they are forced to be engaged in it: Especially when it is in Religious and Divine Matters; because the Genius of Christianity, as such, particularly abhors Contention. Yet Some (very few, it is to be hoped) even here *delight in War*; They love Controversies and Disputes *in Christianity*, which is directly contrary to the Temper of it; and seem to be of Opinion that the *Gospel* is to be *propagated*, as the *Law* was *promulged*, in Storms and Thunder. These *know not what manner of Spirit they are of*, Luke ix. 55. To have Lions, and Tygers, *bite and devour one another*, is nothing strange; But for Doves
to

to fight, is shocking and unnatural. It is true indeed, we are commanded to be *Wise like Serpents*; as well as *harmless like Doves*, *Matth. x. 16.* But then it were greatly to be wished, that we would all employ only the *Wisdom* of the Serpent, without the *Sting*, and *Venom*. Discourse IX.

It is true too, that Controversies may be, and often are, well managed; that is to say, in Christian Charity, and the Spirit of Meekness. But then great is the Frailty and Corruption of Human Nature, extremely apt to provoke, and be provoked: And when (as it has been well observed) the *Saw of Contention* is often drawn backwards and forwards; it is apt to grow *warm* in the Hands of Those who draw it. Considering the unreasonable Obstinacy of some Antagonists, ever Wrangling, never to be Convinced; who *refuse to bear the Voice of the Charmer*, *charm he never so wisely*, *Pf. lviii. 5.* and the Proofs of the Arguer, let him argue never so clearly and strongly; I say, considering This, a very dispassionate and well-tempered Person may take up the Expostulation of Him, who was the Pattern of Patience it self; *How long will ye vex my Soul, and break me in Pieces with Words?* *Job xix. 1.* With Words indeed!

Discourse
IX. mere Words, generally speaking! Words
only, without Meaning; endless Repeti-
tion, and nauseous Tautology!

How irksom is it to perplex our selves with the thorny Notions of Justification, whether by Faith, or Works; of Predestination, Election, Reprobation, of Original Sin, Free Grace, Free Will, and the like; when we know that, however Those Controversies are to be determined, it is beyond all Controversy that we are to live good Lives, to *fear God, and keep his Commandments!* How pleasant is it, on the other hand, to contemplate the wonderful Works of God, the Works of Creation, Redemption, and Preservation, and to practise the plain Precepts of the Gospel! To be relieved from Disputes about hard Questions, and to recline our weary Souls upon the easy Subjects of Vertue and Goodness, of Piety towards God, and Charity towards Man! How much more agreeable is it for the Preachers of the Gospel to let their *Doctrine drop as the Rain, distil as the Dew*, Deut. xxxii. 2. in the plain practical Points of Religion, than to be engaged in the Tempests of Controversy; which are as uneasy to Themselves, as they are commonly unedifying to Others!

Others! A good Christian so engaged Discourse IX.
 (as the Best of Christians must some-
 times be, unless All were as good as they
 ought to be) will ever be apt to cry out
 with the Royal Psalmist, *Pf. lv. 6. Oh!*
that I had Wings like a Dove; for then
would I flee away, and be at Rest. Who-
 soever has the *real* Temper, the *Innocence*,
 and *Sincerity*, of the *Dove*, without the
Malice, and *Hypocrisy*, of the *Serpent*, will
sincerely wish for her Wings upon such
 Occasions; that he *may make haste to e-*
scape, because of the stormy Wind, and Tem-
pest, Ver. 8. Wind, and Tempest, indeed;
 as such Controversies too often are; as
giddy, and as *boisterous*; as *dark*, and as
empty. Which brings me to my Third
 Observation; *viz.*

III. That Disputes in Religion would
 be soon determined; if all Persons con-
 cerned in them were truly and ingenu-
 ously Religious. This, though not expres-
 sed, is plainly implied, in the Words of
 the Text; by the Connexion between
 the Parts of it. *Of making many Books*
there is no end, &c. Let us hear the Con-
 clusion of the whole Matter; *Fear God, and*
keep his Commandments. Implying, that
 if we would duly attend to the One,
 we

Discourse we should have little Occasion for the
 IX. Other. It is confessed, that there are
 many Real Difficulties in Religion;
 which will take up some Debate, before
 the fairest and most unprejudiced Ar-
 guer can, on either Side, be convinced.
 But still were Ambition, Interest, Pre-
 judice, and Passion, entirely discarded;
 how soon would most Controversies be
 at an end! The Apostle tells us of Those
 who are *Lovers of Pleasure, more than Lo-
 vers of God*, 2 Tim. iii. 4. And were there
 not too many who are *Lovers of Victory*,
 more than *Lovers of Truth*; the Wars of
 the Pen would be much sooner finished,
 than the Wars of the Sword. And yet
 we find that in Fact it is often otherwise:
Those are often more lasting than *These*,
 and almost as destructive. Law-Suits,
 Wars, and Learned Controversies of all
 Kinds, would be speedily decided; if
 Justice and Truth were the only Aim of
 the Persons contending. Particularly in
 the Case now before us, were This the
 Principle of Both Parties engaged; Dis-
 putes would be very short: And that for
 These two Reasons. 1st, Because a great
 Part of Controversies, as they are com-
 monly managed, would be wholly omit-
 ted; I mean *Personal Reflections*; which
 are

are as Impertinent, as Unchristian, and foreign to the Merits of the Cause. 2dly, Because, were Truth only attended to, and not the Glory of Triumph; the One, or the Other, of the Disputants would soon acknowledge himself convinced. Were This therefore always the Way of Proceeding; Controversies would be always (what in Reason they ought to be) the Debates of Friends; not (as in Fact they too often are) the Quarrels and Battles of Enemies. I proceed now to my Fourth Observation; which was This,

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IV. That though the Furnishing of the Understanding with Knowledge be very difficult; yet the Rectifying of the Will is much more so. This Head consists of Two Parts; which I shall distinctly, though briefly, treat of.

That the Acquisition of Learning is extremely difficult, the Wisest and most Learned of Men here assures us: *Of making many Books there is no end; and much Study is a Weariness of the Flesh.* And Those, who have made Learning their Profession, are abundantly convinced of This Truth by their own daily Experience; whatever Reflections are cast upon them
by

Discourse

IX.

by Those, who little know what Pains are undergone by Persons upon whom they pass such ungrateful, as well as ignorant, Censures. These People are of Opinion that all Business consists in Mechanism; and that there is no Labour, but in Noise and Hurry: Not knowing that the Labour of the Mind is far greater, than That of the Body. In another respect indeed there is no Comparison: The Last being Mean and Ignoble; the First, Sublime and Celestial; The One being, in a great measure, the Employment of Brutes, the Other of Angels. But though Contemplation be the Employment of Angels; yet, while we are in This Flesh, we imitate them but imperfectly; and can no more think as easily as They do, than we can think as well. For (as the Wise Author of my Text elsewhere elegantly expresses it) *The corruptible Body presseth down the Soul; and the earthly Tabernacle weigheth down the Mind, that miseth upon many Thiags*, Wisd. ix. 15. Nor can she possibly exert her full Activity, while she is thus clogged in her Operations, thus embarrassed and incumbered with Matter. Did even the Unexperienced in This Case *think rationally*, they would easily be convinced how difficult

difficult it is to *think intensely*. Which Discourse
if they were; fewer Remarks would be IX.
made upon the outward Behaviour of
studious Persons, upon their thoughtful
Looks, innocently unguarded Actions,
Vehemence in Discourse at one time, and
Inattention in Company at another. For
if These, and many more of the like
nature, are really Infirmities, and Faults,
which ought to be corrected by the Per-
sons Themselves; They are surely such,
as may very well be excused, or at least
more softly censured, by Others. One
Reflection, however, might be forborn;
That such Persons *come by what They have*
very easily; as it is vulgarly, and foolishly,
expressed: When (as we have observed)
Nothing in the World can be more False,
as well as Malicious.

Even Those, whose Intellectual Facul-
ties are the brightest, and strongest, are,
in all Probability, sufficiently sensible of
the Uneasiness I mention. For if their
Capacities are great; it must be laborious
to *fill*, and *satisfy* them: As their Inven-
tions are good, their Judgments are pro-
portionably so too; And as the Former
are *fertile*, the Latter are *curious*, and
difficult to be pleased.

It

Discourse

IX. It is true, there is a great deal of Pleasure mixed with the Pain; and so there had need: For without the One, the Other would be altogether insupportable. Very Delightful it must be, to trace the Windings of Thought; not only to observe, but to feel, the progressive Ripening of Ideas, and the gradual Advances of Truth, from its first Dawning to its meridian Brightness. But then even This Pleasure of the Soul *is a Weariness of the Flesh*: Even This, arising from Closeness of Thinking, insensibly preys upon the Spirits; And, upon the Whole, take it which way you will, if a *sound Mind in a sound Body* can be desirable in any one Case more than in another, it is in This: No Employment whatsoever requiring so good a Constitution of the Body, as the perpetual Labour of the Mind.

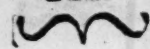
But though (as the Text assures us) it be Thus difficult to exercise, and improve, the Understanding; yet (as it is here proper to observe) it is much more so to cleanse and rectify the Will: Which was the Other Branch I mentioned of This Fourth General Head. I say, as it is here proper to observe: For though it be not expressed *in* the Text, it is very fit to be deduced *from* it. We have all
along

along been making a Comparison between Learning and Religion; the Understanding and the Will: And as the main Stress of All turns chiefly upon the Last-mentioned; This Remark seems very proper to be here made, and entirely agreeable to the Subject upon which we are discoursing.

However difficult therefore it is to be Learned; we must carefully remember, that it is more so to be Vertuous. As it is more easy to be a good Politician in Thought, than in Practice; and to lay Schemes, than to execute them: much easier to understand the Art of War in Theory, than actually to vanquish and subdue a powerful Enemy. And This is exactly our Case: Our Lusts, and vicious Inclinations, are insolent Rebels, strong, and powerful; And it is much less difficult to *know how* to conquer them, than *in fact* to conquer them. And so for all other Knowledge; In acquiring That, our Appetites are gratified; and it is often attended with more Pleasure, than Pain: In regulating our Wills, our Appetites are crossed; and it is attended with far more Pain, than Pleasure. I mean, for a considerable Time; though afterwards (which we must always consider

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IX.



sider on the other hand) the Pleasure is inexpressible, and the Pain removed. However, at first, and for a considerable Time, it is a very arduous and uneasy Task, to conquer This *World of Iniquity*, the rebellious Heart of Man; which is *deceitful above all Things, and desperately Wicked; who can know it?* Jer. xvii. 9. True it is, by Original Sin, and the Fall of Man, *All* our Faculties are miserably corrupted; but the Will is far more so, than the Understanding. *This* is *weakened* indeed, but *That* is wholly *depraved*: The One has still a natural Propensity to *real Truth*; but the Other has, at least in most Instances, a natural Aversion to *real Good*. But as *difficult* as it is to be regulated; we must ever remember that it is very *capable* of being so; and the Consideration of the Difficulty should not discourage our Endeavours, but on the contrary excite our Diligence. Which we shall be the more inclined to; if we consider in the Fifth and Last Place,

V. That Learning without Religion is insignificant; and the grand Result of All, is to *Fear God, and keep his Commandments; which is the whole Duty of Man.*
Let

Let us hear then, and duly weigh, This ^{Discourse} *Conclusion of the whole Matter* : Which may ^{IX.} very well too be the Conclusion of my Discourse. For though it be a Point of the last *Importance* ; yet it is a Point of no *Difficulty* : It is what we ought frequently and throughly to *consider*, but what we need not *prove*, or *explain*. Though I *speak with the Tongues of Men, and of Angels*, (says the Blessed Apostle, 1 Cor. xiii. 1, &c.) *and have not Charity* ; I am become as *sounding Brass, or a tinkling Cymbal*. And though I *understand all Mysteries, and all Knowledge*, all the Mysteries of Philosophy and Divinity, *and have not Charity* ; I am *Nothing*. Charity, which involves all Moral Goodness, the whole Complication of all Graces and Vertues. This may serve to admonish Those who value themselves upon their Understandings, and neglect the Regulation of their Wills : never considering, that (as I observed) it is far more easy to furnish the Understanding, than to rectify the Will ; far more easy to be Learned, than to be Good ; and far more valuable to be Good, than to be Learned. This is what the Apostle reminds the *Corinthians* of ; when he blames them for so eagerly and vain-gloriously desiring extraordinary Knowledge, and

Discourse advises them to *covet earnestly the best Gifts* :

IX. And in another Place he tells them, *that Knowledge puffeth up, but Charity edifieth.* Not that there is any such Tendency in Knowledge it self, according to the Nature of the Thing, but rather the direct contrary ; for he who truly knows Things, among other Things, knows himself, and his own Ignorance : But, by the Corruption of Human Nature, it has accidentally That Tendency ; and too often actually produces That Effect. But such an Use of Knowledge is the greatest and worst of Folly : *The Time will come,* (says a most Learned and Pious Prelate) *when it will more avail thee to have subdued one Lust, than to have known all Mysteries.* Setting therefore a due Value even upon These Qualifications, and by no Means detracting from their real Worth, let us at the same time be chiefly intent upon the *more excellent Way* :

1 Cor. xii. 31.

Let Those who have the Advantage of great Endowments, natural and acquired, consider seriously, what a Shame it is to have a fine Head, and a foul Heart ; Clearness of Understanding, and Impurity of Will : Like Light admitted into a filthy Room, only to make its Indecency the more discernible. And let us

All

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All in general be principally concerned Discourse
 for the *One Thing Needful*; To Fear God, IX.
 and keep his *Commandments*: That we may
 so pass the *Waves* of This vain, troublesom,
 and wicked *World*, that we finally come to
 the *Land of everlasting Life*: Where *Cha-*
rity never faileth; but whether there be *Pro-*
phesies, they shall fail; whether there be
Tongues, they shall cease; whether there be
Knowledge, it shall vanish away.

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